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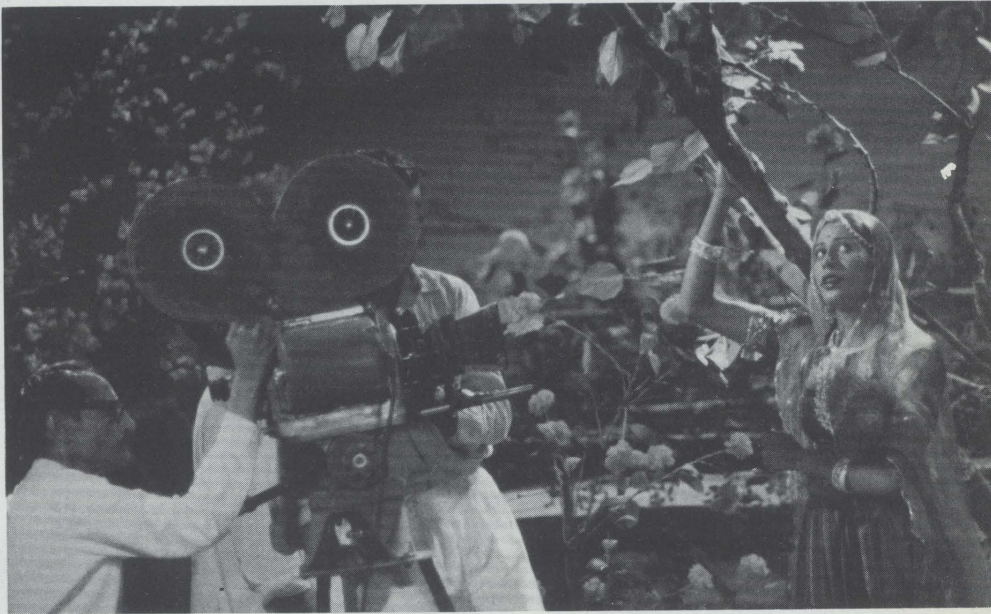
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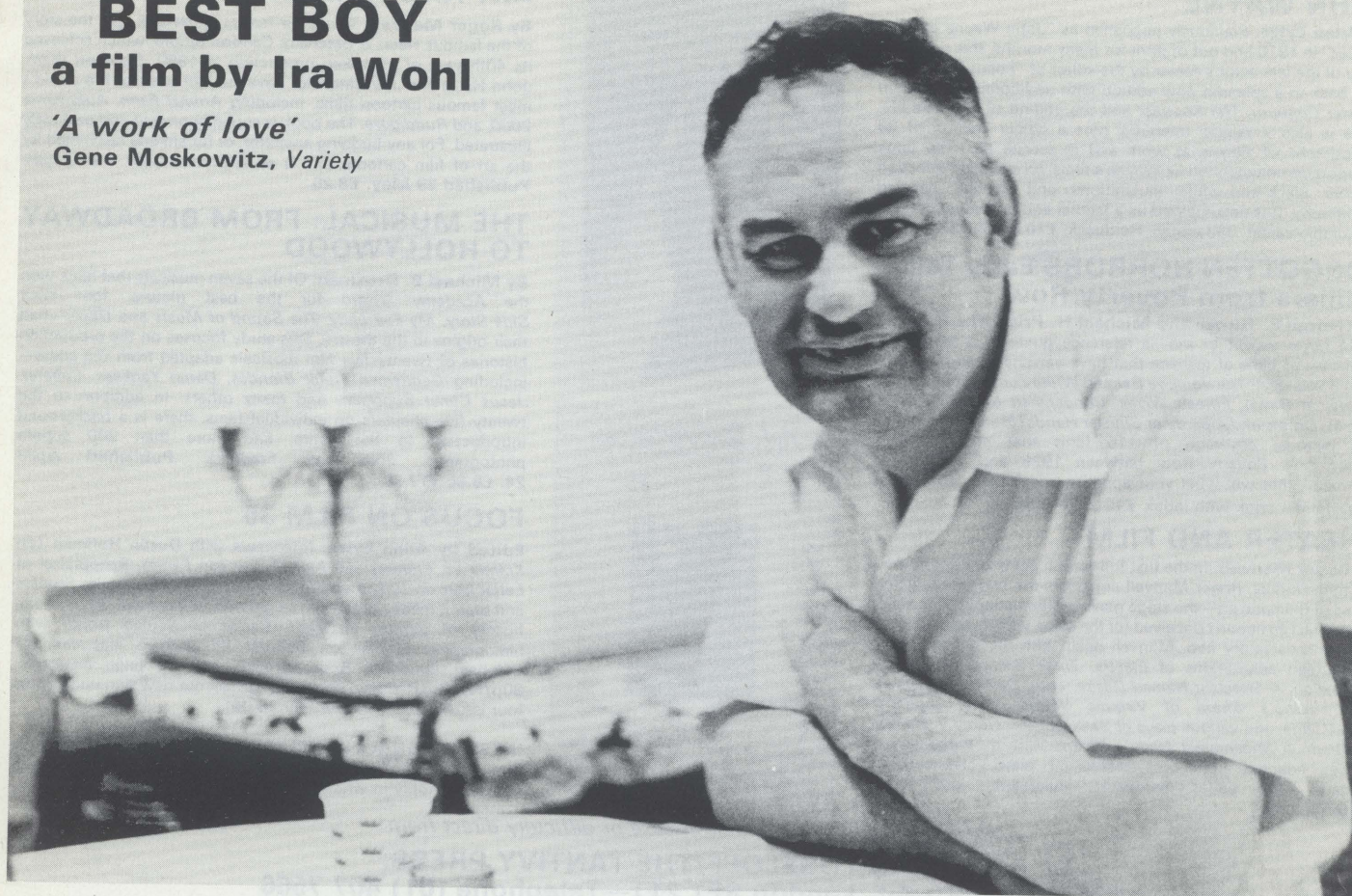
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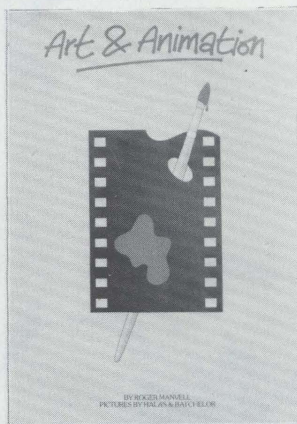
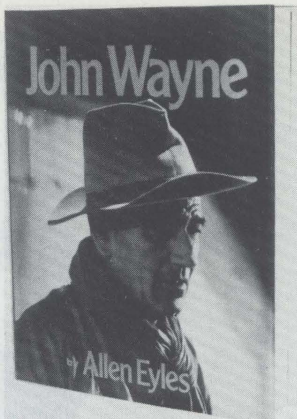
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# SIGHT AND SOUND

SPRING 1980

Volume 49 No. 2

## INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY

Articles	<b>Williams, the Lords and the Press</b> David Robinson	68
	<b>Kurosawa's Army</b> John Gillett	71
	<b>The Cameraman's Path</b> Walter Lassally	74
	<b>The Rocky Horror Picture Cult</b> Jonathan Rosenbaum	78
	<b>Aaaieeeeaaarrgh!:: horror movies</b> James Monaco	80
	<b>TV Weather</b> David Thomson	87
	<b>Out of the Past: an interview with Eduardo de Gregorio</b>	
	Jim Hillier and Tom Milne	91
	<b>Intertitles</b> William F. Van Wert	98
	<b>Independent Frame</b> Julian Poole	106
	<b>Ungratified Desire: Nicolas Roeg's Bad Timing</b> John Pym	111
	<b>Walkabout: a Wasted Journey?</b> John Izod	113
	<b>Less Is More: Don Siegel from the Block to the Rock</b>	
	Richard Combs	117
Features	<b>In the Picture</b>	83
	<b>Fellini's City of Women</b>	96
	<b>George Hoellering, 1898-1980</b> Dilys Powell	122
	<b>Correspondence</b>	130
	<b>Film Guide</b>	132
Film Reviews	<b>Mirror</b> Philip Strick	123
	<b>Cuba and The Human Factor</b> Richard Combs	124
	<b>Messidor</b> Tim Pulleine	125
	<b>Black Jack</b> David Wilson	126
	<b>'10'</b> John Pym	127
Book Reviews	<b>The Films in My Life</b> Julian Jebb	127
	<b>Le Livre de Losey</b> Tom Milne	128
	<b>Keaton: the man who wouldn't lie down</b> Allan T. Sutherland	128
	<b>Journey Down Sunset Boulevard</b> Tim Pulleine	129

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David Robinson

# WILLIAMS, THE LORDS AND THE PRESS

David Robinson, film critic of 'The Times', was a member of the Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship, under the Chairmanship of Professor Bernard Williams, which reported last November to the Home Secretary. Here he writes about reactions in the press and Parliament to the report.

We were a judge, a chief constable, three professors, a solicitor, two journalists, a headmistress, a consultant psychotherapist, a senior lecturer, a bishop and the secretary of the United Caribbean Association. Someone who knows about departmental committees said before we began, 'You'll find that attendances drop off after a while, until there is a hard core of four or five of you who really do the job.' He turned out to be wrong about the Williams Committee. Everyone kept up attendances until the bitter end, which meant that each of us had put in between 150 and 200 hours at meetings, had heard evidence from over a hundred persons or organisations, and read a pile of documents that eventually reached a height of twenty-seven inches and included written evidence from well over 200 more individuals and groups. Some of us went on field missions to Paris and Copenhagen.

This was one of the discoveries: sitting on a Home Office committee involves a great deal of work, with less than a ten to one chance of the luck we had in getting a debate in Parliament. (The House of Lords gave us six hours on 16 January.) A more dispiriting revelation was the widespread inability—shared by people in Fleet Street who should know better—to comprehend that the aim of a committee of this kind is to analyse impartially the evidence placed before it, and to base any proposals on that analysis. The apparent misconception that a committee is a group of individuals assembled to pool their personal prejudices exposed this committee, from the moment it was named by the Home Secretary, to attack from those who felt that their special cause was not specifically represented in its personnel.

The Times reported (23 June 1977) that a deputation of parliamentarians including Lords Longford, Halsbury and Nugent of Guildford and the Bishop of Norwich called on the Home Secretary to express misgivings over the appointment of Professor Bernard Williams, 'whose philosophy of humanism and detachment from religious commitment is very far from being representative of the broad mass of feeling in the country.' In a letter correcting a misquotation in The Times report, Professor Williams wrote: 'I see the task of the committee, besides making recommendations about the law, as that of trying to provide something we lack—an analysis of the very deep issues involved in... problems which serious people can agree to be very difficult. I take it that objectors to my appointment do not disagree with that account of the task. I am sorry they

think that the fact that I am not a Christian disqualifies me from helping to carry it out.'

Notwithstanding this statement, the committee, its individual members and its report continued to be dogged, even as late as the Lords debate, by a prejudgment that (presumably since the Festival of Light, the National Viewers and Listeners' Association and the Longford Committee were not personally represented) it must be a dangerously radical and permissive body. Lord Longford confessed that he found the committee 'rather more restrictive or in my view rather more sensible than I had expected.' Even the unanimity of the report was suspect. Lord Wigoder, in a particularly unjustified passage in his speech, commented: 'That they all came to agree on the matters which they were considering seems to me to be one of the most remarkable feats of chairmanship about which I have ever heard.'

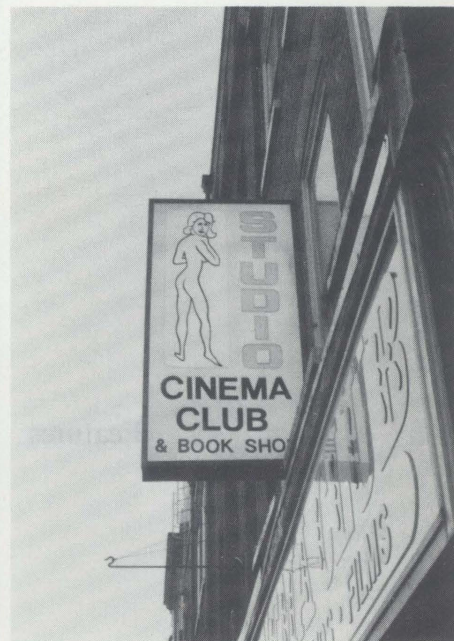
The final draft of the report was finished in early November 1979, and with remarkable despatch the Home Office published it on 28 November. The previous weekend, however, its reception was threatened with prejudice by the appearance of a purported leak in the News of the World, whose lurid accounts of a pornographer's charter and licensed vice drew predictable blasts from the regular spokesmen. In the Commons Mrs. Short asked the Home Secretary to 'resist the hysterical comments that were made by some people who criticised the report even before it had been published and before they could possibly have read it.' Mr. Whitelaw said he had noticed the comments, 'and we ought to consider very carefully what the Williams

Committee actually said, rather than what some people thought it might have said.'

It was too much to hope that this could take the wind out of such sails as bear Mrs. Whitehouse. Still, even her opinion of the thing seemed to rise. Her first reaction was that 'Mrs. Thatcher will exercise her responsibility as a woman, a mother and a Prime Minister by chucking the report in the waste paper bin.' Later, after reading it apparently, she called it 'seductive' and relented so far as to condemn only half of it as misconceived and badly researched.

The first of the three sections of the report records the background to the present legal and social situation in Britain. The second is concerned with 'Principles': Law, Morality and the Freedom of Expression; Harms; the concept of Offensiveness; the relation of Pornography, Obscenity and Art. 'They have produced,' said the Guardian whimsically, 'the synopsis for an essay on moral philosophy.'

The third part of the report contains the committee's proposals. Acknowledging that the present law is 'a mess', the report proposes fundamental changes. In place of



Signs of Soho.

Photographs: David Wilson

the old and enigmatic test of 'deprave and corrupt', the legal definition of obscenity should be based on 'what is offensive to reasonable people.' The major object of the law should be to protect the public from the nuisance of offensive material in places to which normal life happens to take them. The general sense of the report is that total suppression of publication is appropriate only when there is proven harm to some person—and no evidence which was brought before them convinced the committee that there was a proven case for harmful effects from the mere exposure to sexual or sadistic pornography.

The principal practical recommendations which result from these considerations are:

(1) That there should be a total prohibition of pornography which exploits children or causes physical injury in its production.

(2) That there should be a total prohibition on live shows which include real sexual activity of a nature which is offensive.

(3) That pornographic publications should be restricted to shops without advertising displays, which do not admit persons under 18 and which display a warning notice which customers have to pass before they can see what is inside the shop.

(4) That it should be permissible to sell restricted publications through the post so long as neither the publications themselves nor advertisements for them should be sent to persons under 18 or to people who have not asked for them.

(5) That restrictions should not apply to the written word.

(6) That the defence of artistic or literary merit as provided by the Obscene Publications Acts is unsound in principle and practice; and would be neither necessary nor appropriate under the committee's proposals.

A large part of the report deals with films, for which the committee—regarding the cinema as a 'uniquely powerful instrument'—proposes more rigorous controls. The main proposals for a continued film censorship system are:

(1) The abolition of the present system of local authority control.

(2) The replacement of the present British

those who wish to see them, while making redundant the present, specious device of the blue movie clubs, which would no longer be allowed.

(5) Some films might still be refused a certificate for any commercial showings, if they appeared to the Board to contravene the law, or were otherwise unacceptable because of the manner in which they depicted violence, sexual activity or crime.

Once the *News of the World* story was out of the way, press reaction was by and large gratifyingly favourable. The *Daily Telegraph* was alarmed by the freeing of the printed word, but in general praised the practical merits of the recommendations. The *Daily Mail* said, 'The Government would do well to accept the bulk of what it recommends.' The *Evening News*: 'Home Secretary William Whitelaw, who has plenty of common sense, should ignore the ritual protests from the Whitehouse wing and, by and large, accept the committee's plan.' The *Daily Star*: 'The Williams Report offers MPs a good basis for drawing up legislation that will [work].' The *Guardian* admitted, apparently approvingly, 'the feeling that the Provost of King's College and his associates, having been landed with porn, have started a grand inquiry into everything that constitutes culture.' The *Guardian's* most serious reservations related to the concept of what is offensive to reasonable people, and prompted them to pose the philosophical teaser that it carries 'the implication that people who are not offended by pornography are not reasonable, which many would deny.'

In the *Evening Standard* Alexander Walker deplored the idea of a renewed and statutory film censorship: 'The basic flaw in the

ensorship by a much more complex statutory organisation.

The popular notion that the report was the consensus of its members' views was most evident in the resentment of the anti-permissive lobby that we had failed to discover (or rather, they felt, to *acknowledge*) concretely identifiable harms. The *Times'* leader noted that the report 'does not purport to guard adult persons or society in general from harm (except a restricted protection of actors or models for pornographic productions from actual physical harm). This is because in the view held by the authors throughout most of their report pornography, including the pornography of violence, does not give rise to harm either of a type or of a degree which requires that the law should intervene' (*my italics*). In an article in the *Catholic Herald* ('A porn report that fails to see the evil') Lord Longford said: 'The Williams Committee are at their worst when they purport to examine the causal effects of pornography. Anyone who has worked over this ground is too well aware that nothing for or against the corrupting effects of pornography can be demonstrated by statistics.' (Later, in the Lords, he said, more bewilderingly, 'No one, I mean, is able to produce a proof from statistics which would convince anybody who did not agree on other grounds.')

Our critics felt, in fact, that we should have proceeded here not from evidence, but from 'instinct', 'gut reaction' and 'common sense'; and that our consequent reactions should and would have coincided, unanimously, with their own. 'I think,' said the Bishop of London, 'that common sense and "gut reaction" have a part to play.' 'Here,' said Lord Lauderdale, 'is a snide report intended to tilt the balance of opinion back again, in the name of reason as against emotion and religion, from the influence which was articulated and crystallised by the noble Earl, Lord Longford, to whom we can never be sufficiently grateful.' Lord Ardwick, however, pointed out that if we based our actions on the gut reaction advocated by the Bishop of London, 'we would all be hangers and floggers tomorrow and we should all be racist today. It is, I think, a very bad counsel...'

Yet even so wise and rational a man as Lord Annan found the report distasteful in this respect. 'I think,' he said, 'there are too many cases which can be cited by people who have been harmed by written pornography, and by pornography of all kinds, for that matter... Of course there are cases in which people have committed crimes under the influence of pornographic reading.' If this is so, Lord Annan has had access to evidence that was not available to the Committee, which meticulously sifted a great mass of anecdotal evidence about such popular myths as the literary bents of the Cambridge rapist and the criminal incitements of *A Clockwork Orange*.

Strangely, the people who were most opposed to statistics were also most incensed by the committee's scepticism about the evidence of Dr. John Court, the only academic who has interpreted statistical evidence in a way that seems to demonstrate a causal link between pornography and sex crime. Dr. Court is also a rarity as having appeared as an expert witness for the prosecution in an obscenity case which, with



Board of Film Censors by a statutory body, with formal powers to replace the present statutory powers invested in the local authorities. The proposed new Film Examining Board would be a representative body of about twelve persons, which would lay down policy, adopt a supervisory role and hear appeals against decisions of a staff of professional examiners employed by the Board to take decisions on individual films.

(3) The present category system should be changed, with descriptive symbols more explicit of the effect of each category. The present 'X' category would become (18); the 'AA' category would have its minimum age raised from 14 to (16). The 'A' category would be replaced with a new category (11A), indicating that children under 11 would need to be accompanied by a responsible adult. The 'U' category would remain unchanged.

(4) A new category called (18R) would be assigned to films which could be shown only in specially designated cinemas. This would make possible a wider choice of films for

Williams Committee's Report is that it bases its own censorship rationale on protecting the supposedly immature members of the community—but the cinema is far too important an art form and communications medium to be restricted, censored, cut and banned in order to conform to what children should or shouldn't see.' The most openly unsympathetic views brought into an unlikely alliance the *Sun*, the *News of the World* and *The Times*.

Disquiet about the report, whether in the press or the House of Lords debate, seemed to concentrate on four main points:

(1) The committee's conclusion that there was no proven case for 'harm' arising from exposure to sexual and violent pornography.

(2) The freeing of the printed word from any legal restriction.

(3) The apparent inconsistency of the committee's position in recommending the continuation of film censorship while acknowledging that harm remains unproven.

(4) The replacement of the present film

his help, was successful. (The case was heard at Snaresbrook, on the Central Line, a long way from Dr. Court's home ground of Flinders University of South Australia.)

Mrs. Whitehouse insisted to the press that the Williams Committee had 'ignored' Dr. Court's vital testimony. Lord Longford was at least fairer: 'They spend many pages—unsuccessfully, in my view—trying to debunk Professor Court and to rehabilitate Dr. Kutchinsky.' Kutchinsky, a Danish researcher, is the *bête noire* of the anti-porn movement, on account of his lengthy critiques of Dr. Court's work. Independently, and with expert statistical advice, the Williams Committee in this respect came to much the same conclusions as Kutchinsky. Nor is Mrs. Whitehouse's allegation that the committee 'swallowed him hook, line and sinker' in any way borne out by the report's conclusion: 'While Dr. Kutchinsky's explanation cannot be conclusive we have to admit that it is plausible.'

The proposal to exclude the printed word from any restriction perhaps looks more adventurous than in fact it is. The reasoning of the committee was that works which consist of written text tend to be found inherently less offensive than pictorial matter; that the written word is a medium for the advocacy of opinions, and so is likely to give rise to more borderline cases in the law; that the written word and the film have most often given rise to the traditional problem of serious artistic intent in supposedly obscene material. Hence 'we shall propose that, with respect to the area of the law we have been appointed to review, no publication shall be liable to either suppression or restriction in virtue of matter that it contains which consists solely of the written word.' Over and above this, there is the practical and pragmatic consideration that, since the acquittal of *Inside Linda Lovelace*, it seems unlikely that any future prosecution of a written work would succeed in the Courts.

The report sets out clearly the reasoning behind its application of different criteria and conditions to films. 'Film, in our view, is a uniquely powerful instrument: the close-up, fast cutting, the sophistication of modern make-up and special effects techniques, the heightening effect of sound effects and music, all combine on the large screen to produce an effect which no other medium can create.' The report had already made clear 'that research had not demonstrated any convincing link between media violence and violence in society. That, however, is due in part at least to the weakness of experimental research as a means of determining human motivations, and we expressed the view that in this area, where the activity portrayed was, unlike sex, itself harmful, it was right to exercise caution. Caution was indeed urged even by those who told us that there was no evidence of harm...'

These considerations, then, led the Williams Committee to recommend a different approach to films. The idea that the approach was not only different but actually inconsistent seems to have arisen principally from the leader 'What's the Harm?' in *The Times* of 29 November 1979. *The Times*' treatment of this section of the report was singular. The 'Film, in our view, is a uniquely powerful instrument' quotation above appears in paragraph 12.10 of the report,

which discusses the different degree of violence in material shown on television and in the cinema, and incidentally describes in terms of undisguised distaste a considerable mass of sadistic film material we had been shown which had been banned, or removed from films, by the Board of Film Censors.

Omitting the 'Film, in our view...' passage, and two further key extracts, *The Times* used a partial quotation from paragraph 12.10 and discussed it thus:

'Then the unexpected happens. The committee is sailing along in rational detachment towards the farther shore where it will deliver its message of Not Proven, no evidence of harm such as to justify suppression, when it is hit by a sudden squall. The wreckage of that event can be studied in paragraph 12.10 of the report. *The committee has been shown some film:*

'It is not simply the extremity of the violence which concerns us: we found it extremely disturbing that highly explicit depictions of mutilation, savagery, menace and humiliation should be presented for the entertainment of the audience in a way that appeared to emphasise the pleasures of sadism... It may be that this very graphically presented sadistic material serves only as a vivid object of fantasy, and does no harm at all. There is certainly no conclusive evidence to the contrary. But... in this connection it seems entirely sensible to be cautious... We are more impressed by the consideration that the extreme vividness and immediacy of film may make it harder rather than easier for some who are attracted to sadistic material to tell the difference between fantasy and reality.'

'And the committee proceeds without more ado to forge for the cinema an apparatus of censorship exceeding in severity anything known at present to the laws of England—and it does so over the dead body of its own earlier deprecation of the instrument of censorship.'

'The significance of the committee's sudden leap into the statute book is that it is an intuitive leap. They saw a film, they found its contents extremely disturbing, they deemed it unsafe that such a film should be shown, they felt impelled to conclude that it might affect behaviour so injuriously as to warrant taking it out of circulation. "Film, in our view, is a uniquely powerful instrument."

'For that intuitive judgment they offer none of the clinical, experimental, or statistical corroboration that they insist upon for the probation of the intuitive judgments of others in the same field. Just when it is about to be demonstrated for all to see that the legislature and everybody else besides can afford to take an agreeably relaxed view of the social effect of pornography, these thirteen calmly rational men and women jump up in the air like Mrs. Whitehouse and upset their own apple cart. They leave the field as they found it, effectively contested by those who take a more consistently serious view of the harmful consequences of pornography.'

It is a skilful piece of pleading, appealing conclusively in the last paragraph to the 'gut reaction' group; but also—with its suggestions of emotionalism, timidity, comparison to Mrs. Whitehouse (whose writings the newspaper frequently publishes) and warning of 'severe censorship'—calculated to alarm the people who might be thought most likely to favour the committee's approach.

It is perhaps less important that *The Times*' leader writer has a trifle misrepresented things, and that the passages I have italicised can hardly be substantiated. More significant is the subsequent influence of the article. As with the *News of the World* 'leak', we

discovered that people, including back-bench MPs, are more likely to form their judgments from press reports than from Command Papers. Indeed, a few days after its leader, *The Times* published a long letter from Mr. David Holbrook which began 'I have only so far read the press reports of the findings of the Williams Committee (November 29). But...' The influence of *The Times* is wide. Even a very perceptive critique in the January 1980 issue of *Focus* is content to quote the newspaper and in this respect take its word for things.

Is it bad manners for a former Committee Member to admit misgivings, several months after the event? I am bound now to sympathise with those who find that the structure we propose for a statutory Film Examining Board, necessarily so much more complex than the present organisation of the BBFC, could become a cumbersome machine.

I fear, moreover, that though the word 'Censor' has disappeared, this would be a determined move towards a formal and official censorship which at present does not exist. In its earlier passages, the Report acknowledges that censorship is at best a blunt and perilous instrument. A system of classification, to protect people from being unwittingly affronted, is necessary. Yet as soon as the notion of prohibition is introduced, classification becomes censorship. Anyone who has had experience of those countries in which every book and newspaper is subject to a censor knows how happy we are to be free of governmental censorship. The Williams recommendations, however, would reintroduce governmental censorship in this country, with all that might imply.

I feel disappointment in another matter, which neither the House of Lords nor the national press seems to have touched upon. The abolition of the powers of the local authorities, which have been often enough abused by rural bigots and despots to discredit the system altogether, looks like an altogether progressive step. My fear is that our recommendations could restore a large part of these powers. The designated cinemas could exist in any area only with the approval of the local authorities. *Focus* perceived this danger and its consequences: 'Local authorities would have the prerogative of deciding whether or not they wanted such a cinema in their area. The success of this proposal would depend on how the idea fared with local councils. If too few decided to allow such cinemas, the trade wouldn't bother to prepare special prints, but would cut for the usual 'X'.'

Nothing is perfect, certainly not the Reports of Departmental Committees; certainly not any document that is likely to be prepared on this baffling, inadequately researched and finally bizarre subject of pornography, with all its deeply rooted cultural, social and personal implications. It would still be no small achievement and satisfaction to have merited the praise of the *New Law Journal*: 'The Williams Report is a coherent and realistic document which debunks the myths surrounding pornography and seems to provide a rational framework for new obscenity laws; at last there is something more than conjecture and emotion upon which to debate.' ■

John Gillett

Photographs  
Ian Buruma

# KUROSAWA'S ARMY



Akira Kurosawa on location with some of his troops

'Kurosawa returns' was the banner headline in many local film papers when Japan's leading director announced his plans for a new film, *Kagemusha* (*Shadow Warrior*), at the beginning of last year. Not only was this to be his first locally made film for ten years, but it had the biggest budget (6.5 million dollars) for any Japanese film to date. The announcement seems to have made an immediate, electrifying impact on the depressed industry as a whole. Could the Master really pull off a great coup which would put the Japanese cinema back in the international league after all the compromises and disasters of the 1970s?

Kurosawa describes the film as a 'tragi-comedy', a psychological study with spectacular inserts; and much of the promotion seems to be due to Francis Coppola and George Lucas, who persuaded 20th Century-Fox to make a large investment, with the remainder being provided by the Toho Company. (Fox will distribute outside

Japan.) The action takes place in the latter part of the sixteenth century, and the plot is based on events surrounding the life of Takeda Shingen, an important military and clan leader of the time. 'When Shingen died suddenly in 1573, his death was kept secret for three years during which time a double was passed off as the real Shingen. Through the use of this "shadow warrior", the vassals of the Takeda Clan hoped to gain enough time to resolve the crisis caused by the death of their leader' (*Japan Times*).

Unhappily, the euphoria surrounding the opening days of shooting was quickly dampened when it was disclosed that Kurosawa's ebullient and much-advertised star Shintaro Katsu (famous for his Blind Swordsman roles) had been dismissed after a studio row ostensibly brought about by his insistence on bringing in a portable videotape recorder to monitor his own performance. Kurosawa's curt comment that 'we don't need two directors on this movie' was the

last word on the matter. Soon after, Tatsuya Nakadai (the villain from *Yojimbo* and *Sanjuro*) replaced Katsu. Shooting then proceeded satisfactorily until another disaster struck: Kazuo Miyagawa, the great veteran cameraman famous for his work with Mizoguchi, Ichikawa, Ozu and Kurosawa, fell ill, was taken off the picture and replaced by the second operator Takao Saito, who shot *Dodeska-den*.

Armed with this woeful background knowledge, I accepted with qualified anticipation an invitation from Mrs. Kawakita of the Japan Film Library Council to view an hour's rushes at the Toho Studios. Any qualms were soon dispelled by the sight of a beaming Kurosawa dispensing greetings (as well as a booklet containing his own superb costume drawings) and shepherding an excited little crowd into the viewing theatre. What we saw radiated the same confidence: a series of edited scenes with dialogue which, although disconnected, shone from the screen

like a kaleidoscopic appetiser for the full glories to come.

A soldier caught in a series of quick cuts flits through a landscape littered with dead bodies . . . A long-held dialogue scene with three figures at the back of a throne room evokes memories of *Throne of Blood* . . . A sequence shot involves Nakadai (looking and sounding completely transformed) moving through a room with sliding panels behind which kneeling observers are discovered . . . In a night battle horses and soldiers charge past a fortress lit by red flares . . . Everything glistens through Miyagawa's lighting. Bare, wooden décors are contrasted with sunny open courtyards; richly garbed warriors pass through a labyrinth of corridors with direct sound picking up the swish and crackle of their movements. To say that it all looked splendid is an understatement, and talking to

Kurosawa afterwards left no doubt that he saw the film as a kind of mountain to be conquered which could lead the Japanese cinema triumphantly into the 1980s. Despite all the problems so far, it was clear that his new-found enthusiasm and tenacity were totally concentrated on making it the film he really wanted it to be. Or, as his American fourth assistant whispered to me as we left, 'It's become a labour of love for us all.'

Having become immersed in massive viewings at Film Centre of Japanese films from the 30s and 40s for a future National Film Theatre season, I thought that was the end of *Kagemusha* for the time being. A couple of weeks later, however, another stroke of luck brought it back into full vision when I was able to join a Toho press trip to Hokkaido (Japan's northern island), where

Kurosawa was shooting his mass location scenes.

Our arrival at the beginning of a torrential typhoon, which caused the glass walls of the hotel restaurant to shake ominously, was not a good opener. But we awoke to a bright, clear day, and an early start in a studio bus took us on an hour's journey through little townships and a flat, bleak countryside, sodden and muddled by the earlier down-pour. 'It looks like Texas cattle country,' observed an American journalist, seemingly confirmed when we made our first stop: a large barn attached to a horse corral. This was a kind of advance fitting post. On the barn floor were dozens of neatly piled costumes (breastplates, helmets, etc.) ready for the extras to pick up; in the corral, a dozen horses were being trotted, some with riders already fully attired. Another short bus journey, apparently into the middle of nowhere, a quick turn on to a particularly bumpy track, and then the location site itself, a flat plain with no habitation in sight, except for three lonely cottages.

On the right, a straggling group of technicians was handling equipment and erecting a 30-foot camera platform with steel scaffolding. On the left, in a little dip, was the equivalent of a two-ringed circus: over a hundred armour-clad horsemen moving slowly around in a wide circle, while a large platoon of foot soldiers marched up and down alongside, being drilled by a strutting 'sergeant-major' (who should have been Ward Bond, of course). In front of all this was a wooden stockade to the left of a small rise and beyond nothing but the plain itself, cleared of all shrubbery except for some bushes round the perimeter. As no shooting seemed imminent, I wandered towards the horsemen and soldiers, whose begrimed appearance suggested that they had been at it for some time. A helpful assistant director answered my questions: 'Oh yes, Mr. Kurosawa wants them to feel like soldiers, not extras, so they must be drilled until they can march properly.' And what about the score of diminutive armoured ladies masquerading as horsemen? 'Horses and riders are very difficult to find in Japan, so we got them from local riding schools. They know how to keep horses together, and that will help the others.'

Several hours pass. We have had our box-lunches, the horses are still circling, the men still marching, and we have been joined by a hundred or so local sightseers (including babes in arms and a yapping dog), who wander round the soggy terrain gazing at the armoured extras and waiting for something to happen. (A single diversion is provided by a horse and rider who suddenly take off for the horizon pursued by three screeching assistants, none of whom is seen again.)

Now, at last, Kurosawa, well wrapped up against the wind and wearing his familiar cap, emerges from amongst the lights and equipment, chats with cameraman Saito (who has taken over in Hokkaido) and takes a last-minute look at the hundreds of horses and soldiers waiting and pacing behind the stockade. There are now three cameras at various levels facing the plain; dramatically, the whole area is glowing under the weakening rays of the late afternoon sun. Suddenly, a flurry of action. An assistant with a loudhailer persuades the now considerable crowd and persistent photographers to move

Kurosawa with members of his unit



away from the area in front of the cameras and reflectors. I seek refuge behind the stockade, which affords some protection from the wind and gives a good view through the slats. The horsemen move forward and divide into three armies carrying coloured pennants (black signifies the Wind, red is Fire, green is Forest) and splay out into the plain.

Kurosawa is now peering through the camera on the highest tower, while Saito waves and shouts something to an assistant below. Three men dash forward and release dust bags on the plain, and another indicates that the Greens should form a better line . . . the three separated armies, now several hundreds of yards away from us, turn and wait . . . more assistants rush down, rip out little flags stuck in the earth to mark the starting point for the horsemen and then disappear into the shrubbery right . . . soon after, clouds of thick white smoke drift from the bushes and waft in front of the waiting armies. Silence everywhere. The loudhailer man announces a take, ending with the English word 'standby'. The three lines begin to move forward through the smoke, each forming an S-shape as they go, with the sound of clinking armour, neighing and the soft cllop of hooves on earth increasing as they draw nearer to us, eventually passing under the camera tower and out of shot. (The training clearly paid off, as not a single rider breaks the pattern.) Kurosawa waves from above and the shot is in the can, first take and no rehearsal.

Observed, as it were, from the wings, the scene was not only exciting and beautiful but seemed to forge yet another link between the landscape painting of Kurosawa and Ford. This was made even more obvious, perhaps, in the only other take of the day—a reverse shot of the armies receding into the distance, this time against the setting sun, and joined by a convincingly tired and shambling troop of foot soldiers, who kept resolutely in step.

The efficiency which characterised the setting-up and shooting carried over into the mopping-up operations. Assistants stood by to collect the spears offered by the lines of horsemen; a caterpillar tractor rolled on to haul a supply lorry out of the mud; and a horde of assistants quickly led visitors back to the road and the waiting coaches. I was picking my way gingerly down a slope when something made me turn momentarily and I saw one of the finest 'shots' of the afternoon—horsemen passing by on the rim of the plain with the sun setting spectacularly behind them, and two camera towers being dismantled in silhouette in front—recorded, I hope, by the French TV cameraman who was beside me.

Back at the hotel, a noisy, polyglot Chinese supper with Kurosawa, Nakadai and the main crew members, and then more rain during the night and no shooting the next day. I could have waited and seen the big battle scene which was pending, but time was running out and I still had twenty or more films of the 30s to view in Tokyo. Many discoveries here, but they will have to be the subject of a later article. ■

*The army on the plain; the cavalry circle while foot soldiers drill in the background; cavalry in close-up, including some girl warriors*



# THE CAMERAMAN'S PATH

It was in 1954 that I got my first chance to photograph a feature film, *Another Sky*, filmed entirely on location in Morocco and directed by the then editor of SIGHT AND SOUND, Gavin Lambert. So, having just celebrated—or perhaps ‘survived’ is a better word—my first twenty-five years as a Director of Photography, I thought this might be a good moment to look back and reflect on the changes that have taken place in that time and ponder what lesson or clues for the future they hold.

*Another Sky* was a totally independent production, a very rare bird in those days, and, partly as a consequence of this, a box-office failure. For a young cameraman, however, it provided some splendid opportunities for atmospheric photography, which is still one of my main criteria when I decide what projects to accept. Here is a dilemma which has not changed all that much in twenty-five years. It has always been my experience that the potential for creative work is greater in non-mainstream, medium-budget productions than in the blockbusters and 'packages' of supposed international appeal which now form the bulk of productions for the cinema; smaller, more intimate and often more individual subjects tend to get looked down on as 'only suitable for television'.

## Walter Lassally

○○

*'The Cameraman's  
path is not a  
rose-strewn one'*

MOTION PICTURE PHOTOGRAPHY, 1923

○○

1954 was a year of changes with long-term consequences, some good, and some ambivalent or downright retrogressive. The introduction of the Eastman Colour negative, which can be utilised in any camera, rendered obsolete the cumbersome 3-strip Technicolor process, which until that time was virtually the only means of shooting a film in 35mm colour. It was also the year that CinemaScope burst upon us, ending the hitherto universal use of the 'Academy' frame, with its 'golden mean' proportions of 3 : 4, and spawning a whole series of 'wide screen' frames, non-standardised, which unfortunately are still with us today. And last but not least, it was in 1954 that ITV was born, heralding an era of tremendous expansion in television, with far-reaching consequences for everyone who worked in the industry.

When I became a clapper boy in 1946—after two years of writing fruitless letters and banging on every studio door in sight—it was a big shock to discover that the studios were not full of film enthusiasts. 'Just bang those two pieces of wood together,' they said, 'and don't you worry about anything else—just be first in the tea queue.' The only encouragement came from the director, a man many might have called a hack—the prolific John Paddy Carstairs. But apart from his interest, the names of Eisenstein, Rossellini, or Busby Berkeley for that matter, meant little or nothing to the technicians around me. Nowadays the overlap between film buffs and practising film-makers is much greater.

My first lesson in the realities of the British film industry came very early in my career. When, after I had worked only ten months as a clapper/loader, the whole group of studios that employed me went bankrupt—partly because some films that were little more than B-features took 24 to 26 weeks to make—and I found myself on the street, a 'freelance', that euphemism the industry uses for unemployed. However, having promptly promoted myself to 'focus puller', I worked whenever I could

Walter Lassally, Angela Lansbury. "Something for Everyone" (1969; director Harold Prince) was one of a dozen or so features I have shot for first-time directors. It became something of a cult movie after its initial woefully inadequate distribution, but the only remaining print in Britain was recently junked, so it joins the ranks of the "no longer available".



Now, thirty odd years later, it is still pretty hard to get into the industry, the near-permanent state of crisis is still with us, and a choice between security and working as a freelance still has to be made. Television has taken over the role of mass entertainment, and the television companies the role of the big film studios in providing virtually the only source of permanent employment. As each film produced in Britain for the cinema—and often British only in a strictly legalistic sense—is now a one-off affair, there is no ground-swell of regular production which might throw up a new wave or two from time to time. In this respect, we in Britain definitely suffer from speaking the same language as the Americans; no one will go to the cinema here simply to see a film in his native tongue, as people have always done in France, Italy or Greece, ensuring at least some continuity of production in those countries.

Technically there have been some advances in the last quarter-century—film stock is eight to ten times more sensitive to light than in those days; smaller, lighter lights have replaced the ‘Brutes’, the big arcs, which needed a lot of muscle to handle and all but roasted the actors; some very fast lenses, including zoom lenses, have been developed, and all this has made shooting in natural locations much easier and quicker, sometimes threatening the very existence of the studios. The advent of the portable 16mm synch sound camera in 1963 made some types of shooting much more flexible, but has had little or no impact on feature production. In fact, compared to the miniaturisation revolution that has swept the field of sound, the equipment and shooting methods for features have not changed a great deal. Only the schedules have shortened considerably . . .

'The director should never attempt to hurry the cameraman in focusing or setting up his camera. If he does it is the cameraman's duty to remonstrate and the quicker a director is told and impressed with the fact that the cameraman will not "shoot" until he is ready, the sooner peace and friendship will reign.'

In the last eighteen months I have shot three features or TV 'Specials', 100 minutes or so in length, in 25 to 28 days each. Particularly when one is working for U.S. television, schedules as short as eighteen days for a 90-minute film are not uncommon. This means that twelve to fourteen-hour days are standard, but the quality of work expected from the cameraman is not less than on a feature which in 1954 would have taken at least eight weeks to shoot. In fact I often think that I spent the first ten years or so of my career learning my trade, and the remainder learning to produce the same results twice as fast. Is this progress? To an accountant, perhaps; and the resultant pressures, which are always with us, are the main reason why working for television has



*'Electra' (1961). 'My personal favourite of the six films made with Michael Cacoyannis. It was quite a challenge to maintain the severe, highly disciplined style throughout. To me, this is a supreme example of the beauty of black and white; a film I just could not imagine in colour.'*

got such a bad name with a lot of filmmakers. But it is very important not to confuse such practices with the nature of the television medium itself. Unlike many of my colleagues, I have never felt handicapped or frustrated by working for a TV screening rather than a cinema one, and have recently been offered better scripts in the form of television 'Specials' than of features. Aesthetically, with a few obvious exceptions, such as Westerns and other films relying mainly on landscape, I think the vast majority of subjects are also suitable for home viewing. The atmosphere of a darkened cinema is missing, of course, and at times the screen may have to compete for attention, but the

biggest drawback, the small screen size, may soon no longer be a factor as large-screen television makes its way into our homes.

The majority of films made for the cinema end up eventually on television, and this often forces some uneasy compromises of framing on a cameraman. The most common wide-screen format of 1.85:1 is highly incompatible with the television frame, and to make matters worse, one is often prevented from masking the camera gate, which determines the proportions of the photographed frame, with only guide lines in the viewfinder to work to. This is supposed to safeguard an acceptable frame for the television sale, but in practice sometimes

*'A Taste of Honey' (1961). Tony Richardson's lyrical and romantic film was the first British all-location film made for a major distributor and the first, to my knowledge, in which different film stocks were "keyed" to different locations.'*



I was recently able to shoot a sequence for a TV Special on a Hollywood sound stage, to set foot on that hallowed ground where John Ford had once walked. But despite some recent relaxation of restrictions—both union and governmental—on movement of labour,

Having had the opportunity to work on a number of films locally produced in countries like Greece, Germany or Pakistan, I have been able to compare working methods and crews outside the Anglo-American mould. Smaller crews with responsibilities crossing some of the rather rigid lines of demarcation set by British unions are not uncommon on the continent, and in the 50s films managed to get made in some of those countries very cheaply indeed and with very primitive equipment with no harmful effect on their artistic quality—or their local box-office potential, for that matter. By the 70s equipment and methods had become much more standardised, and the use almost everywhere of Arri cameras, Nagra tape-recorders and Elemack Spyder dollies makes a film unit at work look much the same, whatever the location. But as costs rise the viability of production in a small country is quickly threatened; as soon as the negative cost of a feature can no longer be recouped in its local market, production is jeopardised. This has happened recently not only in

As all film-making is team work, the relationship to the others in the team is of crucial importance. A cameraman who had just got his first crack at a feature once told me that when he entered the producer's office



# THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE CULT

Now that criticism and advertising are becoming harder and harder to separate in American film culture, the notion of any genuinely *spontaneous* movie cult becomes automatically suspect. It implies something quite counter to the megacinema of Cimino, Coppola and Spielberg—a cinema that can confidently write its own reviews (and reviewers) if it wants to, working with the foreknowledge of a guaranteed media-saturation coverage that will automatically recruit and programme most of its audience, and which dictates a central part of its meaning *in advance*.

For a long time in the U.S. (as elsewhere), certain specialised minority interests that get shoved off the screens by the box-office bullies have been taking refuge in midnight screenings, most of them traditionally held at weekends. But what seems truly unprecedented about the elaborate cult in the U.S. that has developed around Friday and Saturday midnight screenings of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, over the past three and a half years, is the degree to which a film has been appropriated by its youthful audience. Indeed, it might even be possible to argue that this audience, rather than allow itself to be used as an empty vessel to be filled with a film-maker's grand mythic meanings, has been learning how to use a film chiefly as a means of communicating with itself.

How did this initially happen? As a play, *The Rocky Horror Show*—an English transsexual horror rock musical, crammed with references to American and British B-films, directed by Jim Sharman and written by Richard O'Brien, who also played the part of Riff Raff, a butler—opened at the Royal Court's Theatre Upstairs in June 1973. It moved subsequently to the King's Road Theatre in Chelsea, where I saw it the following summer, and is still running at the Comedy. An energetic theatre piece, it was enlivened especially by a good score and an exciting performance by Tim Curry as Frank N. Furter. The latter character is the transvestite leader of an annual convention, held on Earth, of aliens from the distant planet Transylvania. He plays host and (sexual) Mephistopheles to Brad and Janet, an innocent American couple who turn up at his mansion when their car breaks down in a rainstorm.

The original play derives to some degree from a historical meditation on some aspects of pop culture, even though it confuses and overlaps different strains in that history with what seems to be anachronistic abandon and campy indifference. (The opening song, 'Science Fiction Double Feature', cites pell-mell Michael Rennie in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, Flash Gordon, Claude Rains as *The Invisible Man*, Fay Wray in *King Kong*, Leo G. Carroll in *Tarantula*, Dana Andrews

in *Night of the Demon*.) During the first year or so of the play's run, it was quite apparent that it had personal and political importance for many of my English friends who were roughly the same age (early thirties), women in particular. It was as if some of the more liberating aspects of counter-culture and 'swinging London', rock and cinéphilie, had become attached to a specific dream of sexual liberation—a dream rather than a more explicit invitation to action, because the overall emotional tone of the play, despite the overt violence and kinkiness, exuded tenderness, shyness and innocence of a specifically English variety.

In different terms, one could say that the cosiness of the Beatles and the danger of the Rolling Stones were equally present (at least in their potentiality) in the *Rocky Horror* myth, and were even made to seem compatible by the fact that, like so much English culture, this myth is structured round the very notion of the familiar and reliable, the tried and true. So there was nothing deeply threatening about the play because there was nothing essentially new in it, merely a conscious reshuffling of clichés that allowed one to see the perverse subtexts in ordinary horror films a bit more easily. As with *Hair*, the appeal made to a middle-class audience was one of gentle assault, an affectionate invitation to participate (e.g., instructions on how to dance the 'Time Warp' were distributed at the end of every performance of *Rocky Horror*).

The record and film producer Lou Adler bought the American rights, opened the play in Los Angeles and New York, and went to work on a film version which started shooting at England's Bray Studios ('site of the decline and fall of Hammer horrors,' as Tony Rayns points out) in October 1974. At the London press screening the following summer, the general critical response appeared to be disappointment: once again, a first-rate theatre piece had been undone by a crude film adaptation. ('As [the play] transfers further and further from its fringe origins,' Jan Dawson noted prophetically in *Film Comment* in early 1974, 'the only worry is that some producer may be tempted to polish

and inflate it for the cinema.') And according to diverse reports, the film was a commercial failure when it opened the following autumn and winter in Britain and the U.S.

It was only after this that two publicists—Bill Quigley and Tom Deegan—persuaded Fox to open the film as a midnight movie in New York, specifically at the Waverly Theatre in Greenwich Village, in April 1976. From this point onwards, versions differ as to what happened, and who caused it. The 'capitalist' explanation sees the cult which started at the Waverly as little more than a successful business investment (and one, moreover, which earned \$3 million the first year, and continues to reap profits for Fox as its 200 prints are kept in constant use). The 'populist' or 'socialist' explanation, which views the phenomenon more as a grass roots movement—the spontaneous expression of an audience's collective will—is substantially the one propounded in the cult's own fan magazines, *The Transylvanian* and *Flash*. It was stated even more directly to me by Sal Piro, who helped to start the cult by being one of the first of many spectators to dress up like one of the film's characters and then reproduce all his or her gestures precisely beneath the screen, under flashlight beams.

According to Piro (whom I spoke to in the lobby of the 8th Street Playhouse late last August while he was preparing to appear as Janet with the film, which he was seeing for something like the 297th time), all that Fox and the Waverly provided was a minimal amount of ballyhoo: 'a few balloons', and the practice of playing the soundtrack record in the auditorium for a few minutes before the film came on. The remaining impetus came gradually from a few isolated individuals, who met and became friends in the process of starting the cult, which quickly spread to other theatres and cities.

One of these 'pioneers'—Louis Farese Jr., credited in *Flash*—began the practice of shouting out 'appropriate' lines during pauses in the film in order to supplement (respond to, anticipate, mock or echo) its dialogue. These wisecrack notations—which always seem poised between ridicule and fascination, empathy and analysis—are an essential part of the cult's ritual; they began prior to the impersonations and mimes of Piro and others, and are today recited by large segments of the audience in unison. Collectively, these lines represent a text that is perpetually changing, a complex of layers at any given performance, consisting of both a traditional catechism and a series of fresher contributions, each of which earns a different



'The Rocky Horror Picture Show': Frank N Furter at work

reputation and lifespan existentially, like a jazz solo, at the moment of delivery (and 'democratically', in competition with all the others) . . . Presumably the use of props and more general audience participation (the flurries of rice thrown in the opening wedding sequence, and the water pistols and umbrellas brandished to accompany the rainstorm) were embellishments that came later.

The entire ritual is enacted with variations twice weekly at the 8th Street Playhouse and some twenty other movie theatres in the 'greater New York area' alone, stretching from Philadelphia to Long Island, as well as some 180 more cinemas nationwide. It can be viewed as an unconscious yet authentic act of film criticism, and one which returns live, in-the-flesh theatricality and confrontation to a flashy work which utterly depends on them. As formal analysis, the ritual even includes at one point a collective cry of 'Close-up!' to accompany a cut from long shot to close-up, the second syllable adroitly timed to coincide with the actual cut. (And in *The Transylvanian*, a column by Piro, 'Rocky Mistakes', describes the film's continuity and editing errors—much more evident to habitués who've seen the film dozens of times—in some detail.) Finally, the ritual can be seen as a specifically Barthesian act of criticism and commentary on a Text, which is 'that space where no language has a hold over any other, where languages circulate (keeping the circular sense of the term).'\*

One should note, however, that the ritual on 8th Street (where the original Waverly group migrated in January 1978, a few blocks north, after a series of unpleasant incidents with hoodlums) begins an hour or two before the film does. After an extended wait in line outside the theatre with other ticket holders (except for veteran performers and guest visitors, who are given passes, allowed to wait in the lobby, and accorded other 'star' privileges), there is first of all an established speech by Piro, who welcomes 'virgins' (i.e. newcomers) to the cult, introduces out-of-town guest performers—in late August, a black woman from Chicago, dressed as Frank N Furter in drag, who performs later during one of his songs, a spot relinquished to her by the local Curry specialist—and offers a few local rules and guidelines. ('We don't call Brad "asshole" every time he appears.' And in reference to Charles Gray, the film's narrator: 'We like the Criminologist here, we don't say he has no neck.') After this, the

assembled costumed performers (usually more than a dozen) dance the 'Time Warp' to the soundtrack record before the lights dim. Then at least two musical shorts follow—traditionally ones that feature Meatloaf (who plays Eddie, a leather-jacket biker, in the feature), Curry and/or the punk group Devo—before the feature begins.

According to Ed Bordenka—another member of the original Waverly cult, who described himself to me as Piro's assistant, and sometimes performs as Brad to Piro's Janet—the episodes which occasioned the move to 8th Street occurred when a group of hoodlums decided they wanted to beat up some homosexuals. Curiously enough, this turn of events corresponds closely to part of the account of an ethnographer, Margery Walker Pearce, who followed the cult over a two-year period on the west coast, at the Strand Theatre in San Diego, attending about 27 performances. She reports that the Saturday night Strand crowd (somewhat in contrast to the Friday night audience, which was composed more of sailors and marines from nearby military bases) underwent a series of major changes during that period (roughly 1976–78), starting mainly as a group of male homosexuals under 21 with a few female friends, and gradually evolving into a mainly heterosexual group of male and female college students.

The turning point occurred when a local newspaper ran a story about the cult, approximately a year after it started locally. Before that, it functioned more or less like a gay bar (and one should add that the film is a particular favourite at certain gay bars in some of the larger American cities). Afterwards, 'a new group of curiosity seekers came down to the Strand, not enticed by the movie, but to gawk at the customers . . . Hard-hat types appeared in truckloads weaving in and out of the crowd with menacing looks and insulting remarks . . . These same people bought tickets and led rousing cheers when Frank N Furter was killed in the movie.'

As a consequence, fewer homosexuals went to the Strand midnight shows, while the hard-hats 'drifted away to other pursuits'. The audience next became 'a liberal mixture of the reformed, converted and bored', including some curious parents who wanted to see what their children were doing. Then the influence of punk became apparent in the crowds, which placed more emphasis on the violence, leather and chains in the film (and less emphasis on the transvestism and transsexuality). 'The punks had the film to themselves for about six weeks before the college crowds arrived to take their rightful place amongst the ranks of radical chic,' Pearce concludes. 'The whole experience had been co-opted by straights who, in their groping to be "where the action is", made it totally impossible for anyone else to feel comfortable . . .'

My own limited acquaintance with the cult—consisting mainly of three shows at the 8th Street Playhouse in New York, and some independent research—has been less partisan than Pearce's. Thus it has not been clear to me how much of the audiences I've been part of have been homosexual or straight. It is quite possible that this ignorance on my part allows for a more favourable, open and idealised impression. And yet the electrically charged energy, as well as the relaxed social warmth and democratic spirit of the three



'The Rocky Horror Picture Show': the 'Time Warp' number

shows I've attended is unmistakable. For all the competitive divisions and hierarchies within the cult (e.g., Bordenka complaining to me about another *Rocky Horror* group picking up new supplementary lines from 8th Street performances and then claiming credit for some of them), a 'virgin' is encouraged to feel that he or she can freely contribute almost anything to the collective Text without fear of giving offence—a sense that the ritual, like the film, is an elastic tool to be used, not simply a catechism to be mechanically recited.

Would it be too much to see some of the same principles here as in Renoir's method of rehearsing actors according to the 'Italian method', Noël Burch's fascination with such phenomena as the *benshi* and the mixed-media genre of *rensa-geki* in the early years of Japanese cinema, and the open forms created by Tati's multiplication and dispersion of focal points in *Playtime*? (The latter is extended here beyond the borders of the screen and into the auditorium, so that a non-performing spectator might have the option of viewing Richard O'Brien as Riff Raff on the screen, a teenage male or female performer as Riff Raff in the right or left aisle, or both Riff Ruffs alternately—but not both at the same time.) The fact that these and other aesthetic aspects or implications have been overlooked in most accounts of the cult seems a direct function of the difficulty in assigning an auteur or even a recognisable tradition to these manifestations. In short, the cult is still perhaps too adventurous and mysterious—at least in relation to the rest of the cinema—to be taken very seriously in intellectual circles.

It seems important to make these distinctions at a time when so little community feeling is evident or even possible at cinemas in the U.S., given the steady rise in cable television and video equipment, and new cinemas built in privately owned shopping centres on the outskirts of towns (along with the rapid decline and disappearance of cinemas in public squares, in the centres of towns). In this respect, perhaps the most interesting aspect of the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* cult is the extent to which it evokes and weirdly resurrects, as if in a haunted house, a form of cinema as community that once flourished in the U.S., when Hollywood was still in its heyday. At that time, going to the cinema was automatically a social event, a night at the movies, even a collective form of self-expression—a moment when one felt proud rather than embarrassed to be sitting next to other people in the dark.

\*Roland Barthes, *From Work to Text*, translated by Stephen Heath, Fontana/Collins, 1977.

## James Monaco



Left to right:  
George A. Romero's 'Zombies';  
John Carpenter's 'Halloween';  
Kathy Lester in Don Coscarelli's 'Phantasm'

'What's at the movies?'

'I don't know. Let me look in the papers . . . There's *The Howling* . . . the ad says "it will tear the terror out of your throat." And *Dead and Buried* . . . "it will take your breath away—all of it." . . . And "that master of suspense" John Carpenter has a new one called *The Fog*: "unknown, unnatural, unnerving." . . . There's a double bill of *Phantasm I* ("If this one doesn't scare you, you're already Dead!") and *Phantasm II* ("it's everything you've ever feared—and more!"). How about *The Orphan*? "So young, so evil, they took away his dreams. Now he is their nightmare. A Screaming Psychothriller." Or *The Godsend*? "The most terrifying story since *The Omen*."'

'Forget that one. I saw *The Omen* on TV last week. Pretty weak stuff.'

'Well then, how about *Scanners*? Says here, "The nightmare has begun! Spectacular action sequences and exceptional special effects make *Scanners* one of the most thrilling experiences ever created on film!" There's also the seventy-second and seventy-third in the *Dracula* series: *Dracula's Last Rites* and *Dracula Superstar: a Rock Musical* . . . plus *The Space Vampires* at midnight . . . Here's something—looks German—called *Flesh*: "Thank God it's only a movie. Please let it stay a movie!" . . . And *Maniac!*, "the ultimate reflection of terror."'

'That sounds pretty tame.'

'Yes, but it has a rather unusual sequence of vaginal bayoneting, I hear . . . Speaking of which, Linda Blair's back again in *Summer of Fear*.'

'Nope, I can't take her seriously since that broom-handle rape scene.'

'There's not much left then. Apart from the Stephen King Festival at the Ziegfeld (*Salem's Lot* and *The Shining*), there's only a couple of curiosities. Cinema One has *Phobia* by Armand Weston ("There was only one thing more terrifying than leaving the house. Staying in it."), while Cinema Two has *Phobia* by John Huston ("A descent into

Terror!"). And the Waverly has a double bill of *Human Experiments* ("A journey into terror and madness") and *The Day Time Ended* ("Their lives became a living hell!"). They're both productions of a company called Manson International.'

'Why don't we just stay home and put on that cassette of *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, maybe catch a little of *Dawn of the Dead*, and go to bed early?'

I haven't invented any of this. All these films were in production in late 1979; all the advertising tag-lines are quoted verbatim. Actually, I've left out my favourite: 'FOREST OF FEAR! Paraquat! . . . Agent Orange! . . . But Nothing Prepared the World for This!'

No, there doesn't seem to be much doubt about the identity of the most popular exploitation genre as we enter the 1980s. The notable box-office success of such recent products as *Alien* and—even more important—John Carpenter's low-budget *Halloween* during the last eighteen months has not been lost on the community of international schlockmeisters. For every glossy Hollywood production like *Prophecy* or *The Legacy* that fails to return a profit, there are always at least two like *The Amityville Horror* or *When a Stranger Calls* that quickly suck large quantities of cash from the pockets of movie patrons like the good Count himself on a sanguine evening at the local blood bank.

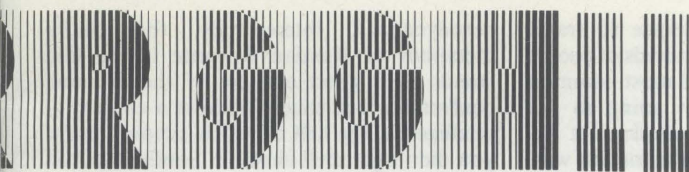
Horror and Terror movies—screaming psychothrillers, to use the mod phrase—are replicating like Snatcher pods. It's getting a bit frightening. You can't even trust movies nominally outside the genre. *The China Syndrome*, for all its virtues, depends too heavily for its ultimate effect on its masterful orchestration of fear. (Director James Bridges should be remembered as the author of the elegant paranoid fantasy *Colossus: The Forbin Project*.) For all its spacey pretensions, *Apocalypse Now* is essentially an aesthetical horror movie, as Marlon Brando himself announces at the end of the film. (His last

words: 'The Horror, The Horror.') And, yes, war is horrible, no doubt about it. So?

In fact, the phenomenon of the new terror is best discussed not in terms of genre, but rather as a general style of movie-making—an attitude, a technique that pervades both international commercial cinema and its artistic fringe. A number of recent films of the sort that now pass for art have hinged on paranoid fantasies of one type or another for their dubious effects: *The Shout*, for example, or *The Last Wave*. We're back On the Beach with Stanley Kramer in the late 50s once again. (We'll ignore, for the moment, the Australian implications.)

The difference between films like these and the more straightforward commercial product is twofold: the art films offer a violence that is more psychic than physical as the object of terror; and they always attempt to justify their exploits with a baggage of mythic references. (See, for example, Coppola's monumental throwaway insert shots of copies of Jessie L. Weston and Sir James Frazer.) Yet the aim is the same: all these films eschew intelligence in favour of what Pauline Kael has called the 'visceral' response, and the singular emotion they choose to exploit is fear (whether you call it horror or anxiety, terror or paranoia).

This is, I think, very interesting. What does it tell us about ourselves—the international community of filmgoers—as we mark the turn of the decade? The pat answers don't work. The increase in popularity of horror in film doesn't mean that we are more anxious than we were five or ten or twenty years ago. If we were, we would avoid such movies. Nor does it mean that we're more bored. That's a patent absurdity. The significance of the popularity of the horror genre is more mundane. Simply put, audiences are younger. At the beginning of the 70s, the main film market consisted, the industry pundits declared, of people in their twenties. As recently as three years ago, that market was defined as 15 to 24-year-olds. Now 13-to-20 is the spread most often mentioned. Much more so



than science fiction (the popularity of which slightly preceded it), horror is a demonstrably adolescent genre, both in literature and film.

This should not be taken to mean that the kids who will come of age in the 80s are somehow less sensitive than we are. *Alien* has not been so successful simply because Rosemary's babies are now old enough to go to the movies. Horror works better for teenagers because 'tis new to them'. This is the 'bogey man' syndrome. The younger you are, the more you are likely to enjoy the rush of adrenalin that accompanies the 'fight or flight' response. (The older you are, the more likely you will try to avoid it.) In *Starting Over*, when Burt Reynolds suffers a quite convincing anxiety attack in the middle of Bloomingdale's furniture department, brother Charles Durning turns to the assembled crowd of thirty concerned on-lookers: 'Anyone got a Valium?' he enquires. Immediately thirty hands rummage in assorted pockets and purses. This is not the crowd that gets off on *The Amityville Horror*.

It is not only that kids have less fear of fear. The horror genre, at its best, also provides a kind of useful psychological service to people under the age of twenty or twenty-five. Horror works, essentially, by irrationalising reality. The rules of the game no longer apply when monsters, alien beings and psychopaths attack. And since that game is the political and social structure of adults, kids reap a certain measure of revenge on the world of their parents in most horror films. Indeed, this particular aspect of the horror vogue of the late 70s has a certain eloquent justice to it. The new wave of horror was foreshadowed by three highly successful films of the late 60s and early 70s—*Rosemary's Baby*, *The Exorcist* and *The Omen*—all three of which curiously exhibited an attitude rather rare in the annals of horror: paedophobia. Aside from Losey's *The Damned*, and perhaps the pack of crazed cub scouts in one scene of Woody Allen's *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex*, children are hardly ever the objects of fear in American

horror movies. Quite the contrary: historically, it's the purity of children's spirits that saves us from the curse.

Why, then, this unusual outbreak of anti-child sentiment in the early 70s? Did those three films somehow speak to the generation of the 60s who had delayed having kids to make the revolution? And if so, why take it out on the unborn? Perhaps Mia Farrow's foetus, Ellen Burstyn's girl and Gregory Peck's little boy somehow symbolised the dreaded passage to adulthood. In any event, by the late 70s, grown-ups certainly had it coming to them.

All this theorising is, however, beside the point. It isn't the genre that is important now but rather the attitude, the technique, and that is considerably less defensible both within the genre and outside it. Like the vast majority of film products on our screens today, horror films are notably more efficient entertainment machines than ever before. The 70s will be known as the decade during which technicians took control of the formerly haywire business of movies. From an aesthetic point of view, this makes contemporary movies much more pure than their predecessors, which is one reason many people still think there was a 'Hollywood Renaissance' during the last ten years. Aestheticians are always impressed first by technique, and masterful technique is the hallmark of the 70s Hollywood film.

William Friedkin, certainly one of the leading technicians of that Hollywood Renaissance, took on the job of filming *The Exorcist* with a sense of the book as a case study in narrative technique that he was going to solve. Comparing his own work to Hitchcock's *Psycho*, he told an AFI seminar shortly after *The Exorcist* was released: 'I figured [Hitchcock] had about 45 minutes where absolutely nothing happened. The audience [is] getting edgy and then suddenly, he whacks them with it and boom, you've got them in your back pocket. So I figured what I'm going to try to do is make this *Exorcist* go

on for about an hour with nothing happening and then see how long I could pull the string.' Sort of like pinball.

Whiz kids like Friedkin, by the way, are continually comparing their work with Hitchcock's. They have a point. As technicians, directors like Spielberg and Friedkin, I think, far exceed Hitchcock as film-makers of power. But Hitchcock isn't important only because he is an accomplished technician. There is a complex personality at work behind his effects. This, simply, is not true of most contemporary film-makers. And when it is true, the mores of the industry work to attenuate and depersonalise the films that result.

Compared with *Alien*, six years later, *The Exorcist* looks like a quirky philosophical enquiry. *Alien* achieves its effects with remarkable economy and, quite clearly, has no other reason for being except to work its effects on its audiences. It's the model of the contemporary horror film, and by extension, of most 'dramas'.

As the technicians have taken power, both on the set and in the front office, we have been reminded once again that the film experience is relatively simple. We go to the movies for a limited number of reasons: for the scenery (because movies are fun to look at); for the sex (because voyeurism is better than no sex at all); for the thrills (including bloodlust and terror); for character and ideas (which, according to Bernard Shaw, is the world of comedy). Only this last area doesn't depend on technique (although sex on screen benefits only minimally from technical advances). It follows that the technicians have concentrated on the thrills: that is where their talents are best seen, and thrills also create the most immediately measurable audience response. You feel it in a theatre. It's like the old well-made play trick of shooting off a gun just before the curtain. But that direct and measurable response might be misleading. The emotional effects of the thrill machine can be escalated only so far. During the last year, the

horror quotient may have passed the point of diminishing returns.

Critics—at least the intellectually respected ones—seldom talk or write about this situation. For the most part, they pay lip service to the unchallenged axiom that more is better. Adjectives like ‘harrowing’ and ‘excruciating’ are regarded as positive comments. A recent review of *And Justice for All* noted that ‘the last three minutes are guaranteed to elicit an audience response.’ This was meant as praise of the highest order. Only in film is power so widely accepted for its own sake. In sports, for example, no connoisseur would accept the exercise of raw force as good in itself: power is tempered with grace, wit, style. But it is just because film is such a potentially powerful medium of communication that the simple exercise of that power is not particularly admirable. It’s much too easy. Moreover, it can be dangerous.

For thirty years, the question of violence in films has been a critical favourite. In general, sociological evidence on that question is ambivalent. Some studies suggest that movies do serve as models for violent behaviour, while others demonstrate that films often work as safety valves, fulfilling violent fantasies that otherwise might be worked out in reality. But it isn’t the violence in movies that poses an important moral and political dilemma for us so much as the violence of movies: it’s not what they show us, it’s what they do to us. This, we have ignored until recently.

It’s important to emphasise this point. We are concerned with the object of a film, not its subject. No subject is inherently obscene. The ethics of the film experience come into focus as we investigate the uses to which a particular subject matter is put. The verb ‘to exploit’ carries three related meanings: 1) to employ to the greatest possible advantage; 2) to make use of selfishly or unethically; 3) to publicise. While it is the first of these definitions that makes ‘exploitation’ films of some interest to critics and historians, it is the second (aided by the third) that has yielded a type of contemporary cinema which really should be evaluated ethically. Historically, most exploitation films have proved to be relatively harmless, per se (with the exception that, like junk food, they can be deleterious when consumed in large quantities). But the potential for ‘selfish use’ is now much more fully realised than in the past. Perhaps, too, such films satisfy an increasingly self-destructive urge on the part of some audiences. This essential masochism may be a result of an historical situation akin to an ecological sink: a berserk response to unacceptable conditions, like Jonestown, or eager Shiite would-be martyrs parading in burial shrouds.

No one wants to admit that a film hurts. After all, ‘it’s only a movie’. There’s a macho code operating in movies just as there is in drug use, and this has been one reason the ethical problems which horror films present have not received the discussion they deserve. And those viewers who do admit that it hurts generally tend to think that that must mean it’s good for you. After all, if you’re just enjoying yourself, the movie can’t be very uplifting, can it? The midcult theory is that only tragedy is ‘serious’.

This is silly. And audiences, if not critics, are becoming increasingly aware that it is

so. Last year, I had the chance to travel cross-country talking with hundreds of people about movies and the second most common complaint I heard was that going to the movies was an increasingly unpleasant experience. (The most prevalent comment was, ‘they don’t make movies for us any more,’ and indeed they don’t. Most of the people I spoke with were over twenty.) These filmgoers were talking about straight horror films, to be sure, but they were also angry at manipulative adventure movies like *Midnight Express*, *The Deer Hunter*, and even *China Syndrome*. One viewer commenting on the hugely popular *Alien* said, ‘I hated every minute of it. I knew I was just sitting there and letting it do these things to me, and I knew that it was basically a series of cheap, easy tricks, but it hurt anyway and I was furious.’ Another found *Midnight Express* ‘a suffocating, depressing experience,’ and wondered if there was something wrong with him for not enjoying a movie that had been so popular.\* (These happened to be relatively young, hip people, by the way, not the querulous old ladies you were maybe expecting.)

This is not to suggest that the only response to these films is revulsion. A percentage of the audience comes to the film with a psychological set which gives them enough distance to objectify the psychic violence. I found Laurence Olivier’s dental work in *Marathon Man* quite funny, for example. People I know more dantophobic than I, did not. Others enjoy the violence subjectively for what it is: this is the central masochistic response. And that is where the problem lies. It’s not ‘only a movie’. It’s quite a powerful weapon. As every film student knows, even edited black and white frames can create a stroboscopic effect that can incite epileptic seizures. Add music, images, emotions, and you can imagine the potential. Powerful movies are often very easy cinema. Historically, horror films were set in human, humane contexts. They almost always provided a catharsis of sorts. Now we have learned to make them much more effective: they work mechanically as thrill machines, like the rack, and provide as little psychological release as possible since, after all, the human context would detract from the ‘visceral’ clout of the movie. It seems to me that a film-maker is thus confronted with an ethical question which must be answered. What if somebody has a bad trip? Do you write it off to calculated risk? It seems difficult to do so if your main and singular aim is to diddle with the audience’s heads. There should be a line of responsibility here.

This is even more crucial in ‘straight’ films. At least in shock movies there is no doubt about the trip ahead. A film like *Midnight Express*, however, was sold as an uplifting essay on justice. In truth it was a coolly calculated exercise in torture, which was not only its subject, but its object. *The Deer Hunter* also pretended to be something quite other than what it was. A small, mean film, it had about as much to do with the politics of Vietnam as *Superman* had to do with

\* Interesting that both Ridley Scott (*Alien*) and Alan Parker (*Midnight Express*) had started with entirely different sorts of movies. They didn’t achieve industry respect with *Bugsy Malone* and *The Duellists*, however. The visceral technique is not exclusively an American preserve.

aerodynamics. Interestingly, the macho metaphor of Russian Roulette in the film stands as a good emblem of the dilemma confronting audiences. Without a context of intelligence, the hell of war is simply that. If you didn’t get shell-shock in South-east Asia in the 60s, perhaps you can approximate that condition in movie houses in America and Europe in the 70s. The specious good intentions of the film-makers only compound the obscenity.

Making an entertainment machine that’s ‘a corker, a walloper, a rouser, a screacher’ (this from a review of *Alien*) is relatively simple. It is possible that such psychological gang bangs are necessary to get an audience out of the house and into theatres these days. I don’t think so. Perhaps we are all so masochistic now that our main form of entertainment is to get our minds blown. I don’t think so. It’s time to pay more attention to the ethical relationship between film-maker and filmgoer and to work against the sado-masochistic turn that affair has taken in recent years. It’s time to defend our screens from the invasion of the movie snatchers. Thrill machines don’t have very much value in the long run. As Godard put it fifteen years ago, real movies are the ones that ‘make love, conversation, and progress, all at the same time.’ ■

Even exploitative horror movies usually have some element of re-deeming social meaning, if only for critics well practised in extracting value from even the lowest-grade ore. Before the recent wave, this was relatively easy to analyse. In the 30s and 40s the prime emotion driving most horror films seems to have been fear of the outsider, the oddball, the nonconformist—from *Frankenstein* and *The Mummy to Freaks* and *The Cat People*. In the 50s, the pendulum reversed; the object of fear was now us rather than them in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, and that masterpiece *Forbidden Planet*.

After the brief epidemic of paedophobia in the early 70s, horror settled down into a lowest common denominator of terror. In the age of anxiety, you need no particular object of fear. Abstractly, the mechanical suspense which characterises so many of these movies suggests that perhaps we are now basically afraid of what’s around the corner, of having lost control of our destinies. Maybe.

The recent spate of Dracula films, however, suggests a silver lining for the 80s. I have always taken the Vampire myth to be the most political of all the classic 19th century Gothic fables. Who is that bloodsucking Count, after all, if not the landlord, the boss, or perhaps the male chauvinist! From the new *Nosferatu* to *Love at First Bite* (to say nothing of Bill Gunn’s 1973 masterpiece *Ganja and Hess*), the revival of the vampire myth in the late 70s just might suggest that in the 80s we’ll collectively drive the golden stake right where it belongs.

# In The Picture

## Bangalore

'It's a curse to be born a girl,' observes the grandmother in Mrinal Sen's *Ekdin Pratidin* (*And Quiet Rolls the Day*), the film which dominated the Indian Panorama screenings at Bangalore. Sen's seventeenth feature, arguably his finest, shows the effect on a Calcutta family when their daughter, their sole breadwinner, fails to return home one evening. Their despair as they search the terrible city morgues and hospitals is compounded not only by their absolute dependence upon the girl for their survival but by their awareness that they will be equally destroyed by scandal should she return unharmed.

As the night grinds on, resentments surface within the family. In the past, Sen's subtle handling of characterisation and relationships has sometimes been obscured by the stridency with which he has expressed his passionate concern. But here the sheer strength of his control makes the family's inexorable descent towards disaster increasingly overwhelming. This is Sen's most devastating exposure of people's connivance at the very conformity which dictates their continued repression.

A similar rage fires many of India's younger directors. Their understandable fury at fatalistic, seemingly masochistic adherence to inhuman traditions sometimes overcomes evident limitations of resources. The most impressive feature debut at Bangalore was that of T. S. Nagabharana with *Grahana* (*The Eclipse*). Set in a village where selected untouchables are given the privileges of brahmins for fourteen days a year, the film explores events triggered by the death of an untouchable during his brief spell as a converted brahmin. Neither brahmins nor untouchables will move his corpse. The head man's son endeavours to help the untouchables, but his efforts result in his father's suicide and his own brutal death. The ingrained exploitation continues, unquestioned by oppressors or oppressed. Nagabharana, a Kannada theatre director and actor, handles his bitter story with flair and assurance remarkable in a first film.

*Pratyusha* (*Dawn*), the feature debut of V. N. Jatla, has an even more appalling theme. A village woman pleads with the elders for her eight year old daughter to be allowed

to become a child bride to save her from the life she herself has been forced to lead as a Jogu woman—a prostitute shared and virtually owned by the whole village. When she is told that her daughter must continue the tradition, she kills the child. As in *The Eclipse* and many other films with village settings, it seems scarcely credible that this can be an attack on customs which are still prevalent—yet Jatla actually interviewed over a hundred Jogu women of all ages before making *Dawn*. The film is as primitive in its technique as its subject, almost as if seen through the eyes of one of its villagers.

Suspensions that independent Indian film-makers might be undermined by inadequate equipment and, more particularly, incompetent laboratories seemed quashed by two new films by the shy, gentle Aravindan, director of *Thampu* (*The Circus Tent*) which was shown at the last London Film Festival. Aravindan is a painter, cartoonist, writer, musician and—disconcertingly—Kerala Rubber Board administrator. He is clearly incapable of producing a clumsy or careless image. He brings the same reverence to landscapes as to people; and his films know no villains.

'*And Quiet Rolls the Day*'



Both his new works have the same theme—the fascination exerted by a mysterious, magical stranger. *Kummatty* (*The Bogey Man*) is a children's fantasy in which a wandering sorcerer turns village children into animals. *Esthappan*, set among Kerala fishermen, concerns an even more mysterious figure whose very existence seems to be created by the conflicting stories woven around him. The films share a delight in exquisite imagery and a relish of enchantment. True, they might be even better if individual shots were held less lingeringly; and it would be sad if Aravindan's pleasure in magic led him any further from the human insights of *Thampu*. But already he is a director from whom each new work is an event, and it is good to see that he has won swift recognition at home as well as abroad. (*Thampu* won the National Award for best director and the All India Critics Award for best film and best director.)

The Indian Panorama has rapidly established itself as the key attraction for Western visitors to India's annual festival, which erupts in a new city in alternate years and returns to Delhi bi-annually. This year's international selection at Bangalore was an impeccable and somewhat mind-boggling achievement, given that the simplest administrative chore in India instantly poses a Kafkaesque challenge. It is clearly imperative, though, that local audiences are dissuaded from parting with a week or two's wages in the hope of seeing forbidden Western porn at the festival, only to find themselves confronted with *La Marseillaise* in a Renoir retrospective or even *Moi Tintin*. Near riots resulted, but a local observer drily reported that calm returned when the police had more time to cope with disorders after the election.

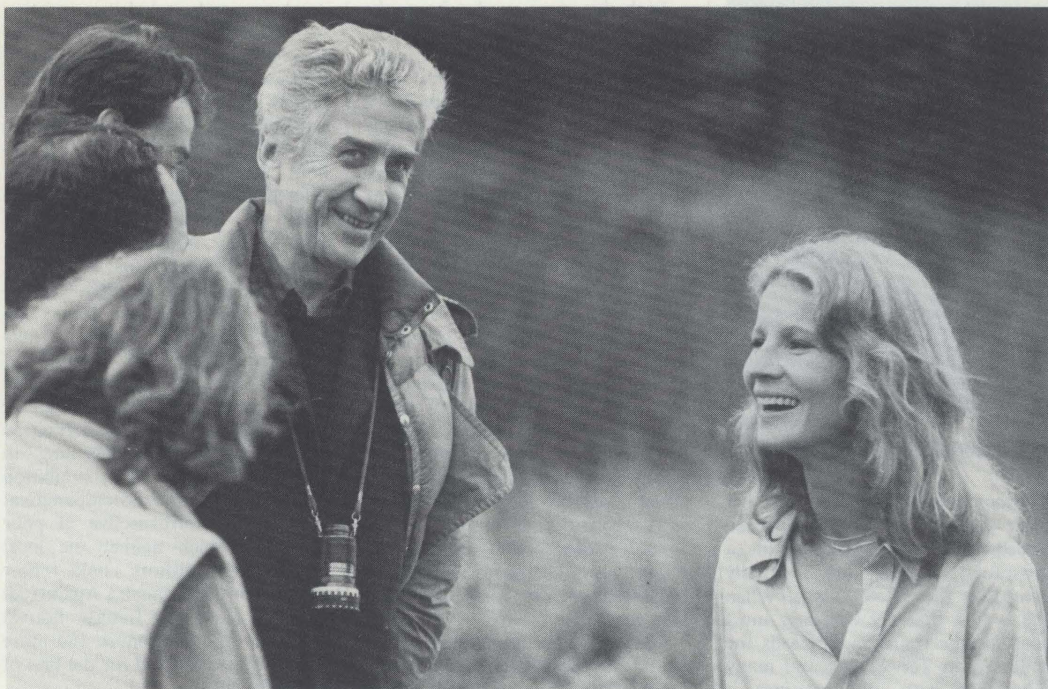
The festival now stimulates any number of valuable offshoots. The latest annual on Indian Cinema edited by Uma da Cunha is even more informative than its pre-

decessors and includes a riveting feature indicating that much of Indian commercial film financing is little more than an attempt to launder money from the black economy. A screening of Sridhar Kshirsagar's *The Great Indian Film Bazaar*, a 2½-hour history of Indian cinema, offered an excellent selection of the work of Indian pioneers, while Indian silent film-makers were the subject of the entire first issue of an adventurous new quarterly, *Cinema Vision*. The first two books on Satyajit Ray by Indian writers appeared. One, *The Cinema of Satyajit Ray* by Chidananda Das Gupta, is the work of the organiser of the superlative festival exhibition on Ray, 'Universal Meaning in Regional Cinema'. (This exhibition deserved a better accompaniment than a Ray retrospective of poor prints in which neither the local audience nor visitors could follow the unsubtitled Bengali.) Against all manner of odds, India's festival seems to be adding more and more planks to its platform for the best of its native cinema.

DEREK HILL

## Mon Oncle d'Amérique

The location shooting in Brittany on *Mon Oncle d'Amérique* ou *les Somnambules* having finished a bit ahead of schedule, Alain Resnais and company moved quickly into an almost entirely gutted nineteenth century Bank of France building in St. Ouen on the outskirts of Paris just beyond the *marché aux puces*. The various rooms still left had been decorated in divers ways to double for a bourgeois apartment in Paris, a more modest house in Lille, and offices in both a textile factory and a radio station. On most days, Resnais moved rapidly from one set up to the next, himself setting up each shot through the camera, rehearsing with the cast a few times, and then shooting no more than two or three takes.



On the set of 'Mon Oncle d'Amérique': Alain Resnais, Nicole Garcia

Things did not always go so smoothly, however. In an otherwise simple sequence of shots, for example, the two young children involved as actors seemed unable to repeat their movements in exactly the same way twice or to keep to their marks. After two hours trying to get a single shot right, cinematographer Sacha Vierny and assistant director Jean Léon were as irritated as actors Roger Pierre and Nelly Borgeaud (providing off-screen voices), and none of the four was keeping it a secret. Seemingly unperturbed by the fact that he now had four adults to soothe as well as the two children to coax into giving him what he wanted, Resnais kept smiling as he whispered to and caressed all six. When the shot was finished, he moved on to the next without comment.

Resnais' eighth feature was 'inspired' by the books and ideas of the scientist Henri Laborit, who has been experimenting and theorising in 'agressologie' for over twenty years. Laborit has been attempting to understand why 'when you place two men in the same territory, there will always be an exploiter and an exploited, a master and a slave,' as well as 'which aggressive behaviour is locked into human nature and which is merely acquired, particularly as such behaviour relates to ambition.' Resnais and his scenarist Jean Gruault (who has collaborated on scripts with Rivette, Rossellini, Godard and Truffaut) claim that what they are doing is neither a vulgarisation nor an illustration of Laborit's ideas. Resnais' structure is composed of a fictional story and a series of short discourses by Laborit among his laboratory rats. 'The two will coexist, but not necessarily coincide. The fiction doesn't illustrate the biological thesis, and the thesis doesn't necessarily comment on the action. Sometimes the two lines cross, but just as often they run parallel or even move away from one another. When they do meet it is in the area of associated ideas rather than in logic.'

None the less, the plot contains more than a few elements of interest to Dr. Laborit. Gérard Depardieu plays an Angevin peasant who claws his way up to the presidency of a textile firm in spite of what his behaviour does to those around him, including his wife (Marie Dubois). Paralleling his story are those of Jean (Roger Pierre), a bourgeois who manipulates his way into heading a radio network, and Janine (Nicole Garcia), an ambitious career woman who finds she must choose between her romantic love for Jean, her career, and her friendship for the Depardieu character.

Although Resnais has not worked with Gruault before, he seems more than satisfied with the collaboration. And he has once again surrounded himself with friends and family who have been with him on almost every film since *Night and Fog* in 1955, including cinematographer Sacha Vierny, production designer Jacques Saulnier and assistant director Florence Malraux (Madame Resnais). Perhaps that is why he seems so relaxed about fulfilling his contractual obligation for delivering the first finished print of the 11 million franc production by the last day of April. That date has its significance, of course, and before the end of shooting the rumours have already begun that *Mon Oncle d'Amérique* is going to Cannes. Put that next to the report that Godard's new film may also be at the Palais, and it would seem there is still life left in the old new wave.

DAVID OVERBEY

## The Betamax Case

As soon as videorecorders came on the scene, it was inevitable that sooner or later the film companies would complain. Since the early years, the film companies and distributors have steadfastly held tight control over their prints through leasing arrangements and print destruction clauses and a

refusal to allow prints to be sold to the public. The development in recent years of an 8 mm. collectors' market has marginally loosened that policy; but the arrival of videocassette recorders has strengthened the demand for the sale of prints to an economically significant degree. There is now strong pressure on the film companies to release titles for marketing to the public in the form of videocassettes. It is not a pressure which is welcomed, and the old restrictive attitudes are fighting hard to resist it. For the owner of a videocassette recorder (VCR) at present there is, therefore, only a limited choice of film titles which he can buy legitimately (leaving aside the semi-clandestine pornographic market).

This means that anyone buying a VCR is, with the best will in the world, almost certain to intend using it primarily for recording. One motive is to build up a library: he records off the air instead of buying a print or a cassette. To that extent his recording activity is in direct economic conflict with the retail sale of that same print/cassette—if it is in fact on sale retail. Although blank cassettes are quite expensive, there is nevertheless a considerable saving if one records privately. Current UK prices (US prices are somewhat lower) for the purchase of a full-length colour feature film on the legitimate open market are about £100 in 8 mm., about £40 for a pre-recorded videocassette and about £10 for a blank cassette.

The second motive for recording off the air is for 'time shifting'. The current generation of VCRs can record one TV programme while the family is watching another channel, or it can record while the set is not even turned on, or while the house is empty. It is thus a very useful device for catching up with programmes. The normal practice in such cases is to delete the recording shortly afterwards and re-use the tape again and again. Here there is no significant clash with other legitimate

economic activities. And because blank cassettes are not so cheap and film or TV buffs still form only a small group, the evidence seems to indicate that most VCRs and blank cassettes are used for time-shift purposes. (The use of VCRs in educational establishments is another matter altogether.)

This proportion is likely to increase even more when the new process of video disc arrives. This will have several advantages for both manufacturer and collector. The disc, unlike tape, cannot be used for home recording and so there will be no direct competition with retail sales. And yet the pre-recorded disc will be so cheap (£10 or less for a full-length feature is the sort of figure being quoted), largely because one can mass-produce discs but not tapes, that it will easily undercut even blank tapes. At the same time the reproduction quality will be greatly superior to that of cassettes, not only of sound (which will reach high-fi standards) but also of visuals. One can expect that, in so far as the film industry provides films for sale on disc, collectors will prefer to buy rather than record at home.

However that may be, the legal position of home recording is far from clear, and the recent (2 October 1979) decision of a US Federal District Court in California in the 'Betamax' case (*Universal City Studios Inc. & Walt Disney Productions v. Sony Corp. of America*) is therefore being studied with close interest.

The case involves practically every combination of issue imaginable at this stage. The two plaintiff companies between them manufacture both theatrical films and television series; and Disney Productions is one of the very few companies, if not the only one, to take a highly sophisticated view of the marketability of its films and to have both released on to the 8 mm market and followed a consistent policy of rotating theatrical release (about every 7-10 years) so as to reach each new generation of film-goers. The usual complaint of consumer-hostile restrictive practices cannot, therefore, be levelled against this company (except for its refusal to make the 1930s Mickey Mouse cartoons properly available).

Both companies release their product into the television networks in various ways: theatrical films, TV films, programmes using selections from their back libraries. In some cases their films are also released on video discs (in the US) either before or after transmission or theatrical release.

The action was brought primarily against Sony, as being the manufacturer and US distributor of the Betamax VCR. The companies claimed that Sony knew the Betamax would be mainly used for recording off the air and that such recording would substantially include theatrical and TV films, thereby infringing their copyright. Sony, although not itself making copies, was providing the wherewithal for others to do so and therefore liable when they did. At the same time, for good measure, the plaintiffs sued a private owner of a Betamax who

admitted making copies for his own use, some retail shops which sold it and in the process demonstrated it to customers, and an advertising agency which promoted it.

Although there were subsidiary claims, the central issue was whether private recording off the air for replaying in the home was a prohibited infringement of copyright. This has always been a bone of contention between record companies and owners of tape recorders, but never to the point of legal proceedings because of the invasion of privacy involved in gathering evidence of home recording. Instead, a semi-tax remedy has been adopted in Germany by levying a lump-sum charge on the sale of tape recorders (but not, yet, on the sale of blank tapes). The Whitford Committee has proposed the same system for Britain.

The American film companies went much further, and asked for a prohibition on the sale of VCRs, not merely a compulsory royalty. But the court, in this first case on personal use of copyright materials in the privacy of the home, held against the film companies on all issues. 'Non-commercial home use recording of material broadcast over the public airwaves does not constitute copyright infringement.' It is permissible under both the old and the new (1976) US Copyright Acts and is a fair use of the copyrighted works. In any case, the manufacturers and sellers of the recording equipment are not liable in any way for the home use copying by the buyer. The decision was very carefully limited to hard-core privacy and the position of in-house copying for institutional or educational use was expressly left open.

The judgment contains much very important detail and will almost inevitably be appealed up to the Supreme Court.

NEVILLE HUNNINGS

## Angelopoulos' Alexander

On 2 January, in a temperature six degrees below zero, and under a metre of snow, Theodor Angelopoulos, the director of *O Thiasos* (*The Travelling Players*, which Italian critics have voted the best film of the 1970s), began work, with the same crew, on *O Megalexandros* (*Alexander the Great*), after a year of hold-ups caused by practical as well as organisational problems. The shooting is taking place in Dotsikon, a bleak, deserted village of wood and stone, and without electricity, situated thirty kilometres of bad road from the nearest large town, Grevena, in Macedonia, near the Albanian border. The film is a co-production by the Greek, Italian and German television networks. 'I could have shot this film without any problems in Italy, France or Germany,' Angelopoulos remarks, 'but I wanted to make it a Greek film. It's awful to love and work for your own mother, when this mother doesn't give a damn! Making a film in Greece now is worse than it was under the colonels. There's a sort of

indirect censorship, covert but effective. When I made *The Travelling Players*, I wasn't well known. Now everyone knows who I am and I'm surrounded by people keeping an eye on me.'

*Alexander the Great* is set in 1900, and draws on two different sources. 'He's not the historical Alexander the Great. My subject is based on an actual incident which happened in Greece in 1870, when bandits kidnapped a group of English tourists; and also on a popular novel written anonymously during the Turkish occupation. In the book, Alexander is a liberator, a popular hero. I have merged the two sources and shifted the action to 1900, and constructed a story where the mythical hero, who is an important figure to the Greek people even today, dies at the hand of his own people.'

In the film, Megalexandros escapes from prison with some of his men, captures the English tourists to hold as hostages, and returns to his village, where he finds there is a commune in existence, superintended by a local teacher, a socialist intellectual who has joined forces with peasants and shepherds in an agrarian cooperative. The commune is joined by a group of fugitive Italian anarchists, who have been attracted by news of it. The film explores the tensions and confrontations between the three different factions, which eventually lead to bloodshed. The only survivor of the final massacre is a young boy named Alexander, who represents the continuity of history. Megalexandros is played by the Italian actor Omero Antonutti, Grigoris Evangelatos (the poet in *The Travelling Players*) plays the village schoolmaster, and the anarchists are led by Giorgio Albertazzi, Laura De Marchi and Norman Mozzato. Eva Kotamanidou (Electra in *The Travelling Players*) plays a composite role of mistress, daughter and sister to Megalexandros, who eventually subjects her to a trial.

'When the little Alexander, sole survivor of the slaughter, comes into the city, he finds the end of the world. I think the theme of the popular hero is very current, like that of the

charismatic leader—Hitler, Stalin, Khomeini... as well as the idea of a commune and its destruction. It is the end of an era, a kind of twilight. No one knows if the night will be long or short, or what colour the following dawn will be.' Twilight tones dominate the film, exigencies of the climate: 'This fog and this damp air are exactly what I want. The dominant colour in the film will be this dark brown, we'll need to dig over all the remnants of green.'

Angelopoulos regards classical Greece and classical themes as obstacles to be surmounted in the search for a new language, a renewal of linguistic forms after the linguistic homogeneity of his preceding trilogy: 'Classical Greece is like a monument which the Greeks have always dragged along behind them; like a marble head you carry under your arm. It's our destiny, and we can't get rid of it; we go about with a marble bust which we need to break.'

TONY MITCHELL

## Festival in Havana

One of the highlights of the First International Festival of New Latin American Cinema, held recently in Havana as part of the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Castro revolution, was a round table discussion on the effects of 'Hollywood' and multi-national companies on the Third World. It was led by Armand Mattelart, one of the makers of *The Spiral* and co-author of *How to Read Donald Duck*, the seminal study of the ideology of Walt Disney at work in 'underdeveloped' countries. Yet, although 'revolutionary' ideology was obviously the basic criterion for the film selection, the only time anti-imperialist jargon was heard was in the opening speech by Vice-Minister of Culture and founder of ICAIC Alfredo Guevara. Ironically, many of those who enthusiastically applauded his remarks, especially that the new Cuban cinema had freed Cubans from their hunger for Hollywood's exploitative dreams, were to be found later in the hotel bar glued to the images of Marlene Dietrich and George Raft in a television

screening of *Manpower*.

While such ironies and paradoxes multiplied, the event itself must be counted a great success, if only because it provided an opportunity to see something of what is happening in the cinemas of countries which are rarely represented on the more ordinary festival circuit. Venezuela, for example, sent over twenty shorts and features; and although many suffered rather obviously from a lack of technical means, at least two features and a short merited international attention. Ana Cristina Henriquez' fifteen-minute *Las Turas* follows, without narrative explanation, a fertility ritual to ensure good crops through various levels of the Maparari region. Both Ivan Feo and Antonio Llerandi's *Pais Portatil* (in which a man thinks about—and 're-creates'—a century of familial and national history during a bus ride) and César Bolívar's *El Rebaño de los Angeles* (in which a young girl, after the death of her mother, begins to have delusions about her mother's lover) show sophistication in their narrative structures and a sense of irony in their approach to their subjects. Both have socio-political points to make, but do so through narrative and character rather than sermonising.

Much the same can be said for Ciro Durán's hard-hitting semi-documentary from Colombia, *Gamin*. A good deal of the film is technically 'rough', primarily because of the conditions under which Durán shot as he observed, and only partially 're-created', the lives of Bogotá's street children as they went through their daily routines of prostitution, robbery and death. Oddly, the film was unpopular among most of the Cubans at the Festival, who found it 'condescending' and suggested that while the poor may be shown as victims of exploitation, they may never be seen as themselves exploitative or vicious. *Gamin* and the Brazilian exploitation film *Xica da Silva* (in which a black prostitute 'works' her way to the top in early colonial Brazil) were the only two films at the Festival which have had commercial runs outside Latin America.

Of the new Cuban films, there seemed little which might be of interest to non-Cubans. Pastor Vega's women's liberation tale *Retrato de Teresa* caused some controversy among Latin Americans, but was received with indifference by most of the Europeans and North Americans, who had long ago experienced stronger attacks on sexism. Chilean director Sergio Castilla's Cuban-made *Prisioneros Desaparecidos* merely covered once again the torturing of political prisoners by the Chilean regime without adding anything new on any level. Sergio Giral's *Mahuala* (about a slave uprising in 1840), like the opening Peruvian entry, Federica Garcia's *Laulico* (a peasant 'bandit' is politically 'radicalised'), had a clumsily handled narrative which seemed to take far longer than its ninety minutes to reach its long-foreseen ideological conclusions.

On the other hand, there were treasures to be found in the retrospective sections. The work of Tomás

Oscar Valdes' 'El Extrano Caso de Rachel K'



Gutiérrez Alea and Humberto Solás is already known outside Cuba. Oscar Valdés is another matter, since he remains unknown outside Latin America except for one or two short documentaries. His feature (evidently his first) *El Extraño Caso de Rachel K* is some five years old, but was easily the best film shown in Havana. *Rachel K* was obviously much influenced by Hollywood's film noir tradition, with its slabs of light and shadow cutting across glossy black and white images, and its tale of the murder of a prostitute-cabaret entertainer in the 20s, the investigation of which uncovers corruption running throughout society. Valdés seems a 'natural': his visual style pulls one along through the narrative, making dialogue almost unnecessary. The film will soon be seen at a number of North American and European festivals, in spite of its age, as festival directors and programmers waxed enthusiastic about their 'discovery'.

DAVID OVERBEY

## Rhapsody in Blue

Critical barricades seem recently to have been going up all over New York, as though film writers had been goaded by the end of a decade to take up new defensive positions. 'Defensive' is the key word, for the barricades don't so much mark out new ground claimed in critical skirmishes as ward off much of contemporary cinema. A certain exasperation, a grudging willingness to look over the medium but not to tolerate its claim to seriousness, used to typify a kind of high-toned reviewing in non-film publications. With the proliferation of theories and *politiques* in the 60s and 70s, not to mention the fragmentation of film-making itself, that kind of mandarin ignorance seemed to be ebbing. But the recent commercial resurgence of Hollywood, and the

imposition of a new set of blockbusting formulae, might have reactivated that deplorable impulse with a vengeance.

Across the board (from the *Village Voice* to the *New Yorker*), critical reactions to the recent season of films in New York have expressed a new mood of exasperation. It suggests an impatience not only with the movies themselves but with the whole business of talking about films, a backlash against all the enthusiasms and movie-consciousness of recent years and a retreat to the kind of comforting but wilfully blinkered snobbery which considered it valid to discuss whether or not the cinema was an art. Which leads directly to one's dismay not only at what is being rejected but at the kind of films that are being allowed in behind the barriers.

In the *New Yorker* (5 November, 1979), Renata Adler deplores the critical 'interference' which audiences have lately had to put up with: 'When an overriding consciousness of film-makers, especially of directors, set in, a great deal was lost.' What was lost was the simple ability to suspend disbelief, to mingle with the story and characters on screen and forget about the illusionism that put them there. 'A further development was a shift in the focus of attention to criticism itself. It was no longer a question of the character's fate, or the star's, or even the film-maker's, but of the critic's—in love or, more commonly, at war—out there.' Only at two recent films, *Breaking Away* and *Time After Time*, did Ms Adler find audiences who were critically 'left alone' to enjoy themselves; in fact, these were 'the only happy movie audiences in New York lately...' To this school of thought, only something of modest aims and humbly undemanding technique is acceptable; anything more would inevitably expose the medium's shallowness. After all, Ms Adler's

attack on critics making too much of themselves is more a concern that they shouldn't overwork themselves. Regardless of whether a critic is good or bad, there is something heroic in his even wanting to take on this medium. The recent situation 'seems to have come about largely, and paradoxically, because most movies simply will not support much criticism. The vitality and conviction of a practising critic were almost certain to exceed those of most films.'

Ms Adler is not alone in the films and the kind of cinema she singles out for praise. 'Robert Benton's *Kramer vs. Kramer* is the film of the year, according to this year's extraordinarily perceptive New York Film Critics Circle...' So began Andrew Sarris' column in the *Village Voice* for 31 December, and his verdict was echoed in quite unanimous praise for this drama of a father's custody battle with his estranged wife for the son he has learned to love and care for.

The director, Robert Benton, has the sort of movie-buff credentials that earn Sarris' respect. But his praise for *Kramer vs. Kramer* seems to have rather less to do with its movie merits than with endorsing its human content, its transparent representation of a social problem. Leaving aside the special pleading with which the film puts that problem across, it is hard to imagine the Sarris of a few years ago glossing over its stylistic devices—the Bergmanesque close-ups; the 'classical' proportion and solemnity it imposes with little repetitions of scenes and motifs—quite as glibly as he does here.

Like Peter Yates' *Breaking Away*, the other critical smash hit, *Kramer vs. Kramer* seems to offer unmediated human interest. What it may also have on its side, almost as a corollary of its scrupulous naturalism, is the New Yorker's oft-remarked parochialism. Roger Angell's review in the *New Yorker*

(24 December) more or less awards the film points for the things it 'gets right' about the city: 'When Billy Kramer cuts himself badly in an accident in a Central Park playground, I instantly thought, What's the nearest hospital—Lennox Hill? Take him to Lennox Hill! And Ted Kramer sweeps the boy into his arms and runs to Lennox Hill Hospital.'

This new consensus has singled out for particular vituperation exactly those films where the relation of content and representation, subject and style, is problematic to say the least. It is hard to resist the conclusion, however, that there is something more liberating and adventurous about Steven Spielberg's *1941*—a collection of *Mad* magazine sketches quite bereft of redeeming social value, a Hollywood-gobbling-up-Hollywood joke—than the ironclad Oscar-fodder of *Kramer vs. Kramer*. But the conceptual conundrum posed by *1941* has been as little appreciated as the dialectical tactics of Richard Lester's *Cuba*—bracketing its *Casablanca* romance with revolutionary politics, and vice versa—because the 'content' of both films is being made up and taken apart as they go along.

Just how pervasive the new 'realist' ethic has become may be seen in Sarris' *Village Voice* column of 24 December, where he takes both *Cuba* and *1941* to task for being historically inaccurate to devious anti-American ends: 'No one would seriously argue that America back then was all Mom's apple pie and the wonderfully clean-cut boys in the recruiting poster movies. But neither were American soldiers all Genghis Khans and Jack the Rippers as they are in Spielberg's *1941*. One would think from this film that it was we who attacked the Japanese at Pearl Harbour.' In the *New York Times* of 23 December, Vincent Canby gloomily prophesies a 'Mirthless Future' in his analysis of audience reactions to *1941*. Ironically enough, his concluding paragraph (although intended negatively) almost acknowledges that films may not simply be reflecting surfaces: 'As these "new" directors spare no expense making movies for an industry that has always put great store by thinking big, they are taking financial risks and indulging themselves in ways totally unknown in the "old" Hollywood, except for the work of someone like Eric von Stroheim. These co-called "young Turks"... have learned very quickly how to outdo the wildest extravagances of their predecessors. That, perhaps, is the basic joke of a movie like *1941*.'

RICHARD COMBS



Thames Television's splendid 'Hollywood' series, produced, written and directed by Kevin Brownlow and David Gill, has been rediscovering the glories, splendours and in some cases absurdities of silent movies. The series will be discussed at length in our next issue. Meanwhile, a reminder of early location shooting in Los Angeles in this bold shot from a Universal serial of 1921, 'The Terror Trail'. The girl on the ladder is Eileen Sedgwick.

# TV WEATHER

David Thomson

Do you watch the weather? Do you believe it has a sequence, every stage of which you must read or follow? Is it a story or a composition? Do you tremble at the rumour-mongering of bruised clouds that threaten outburst? Are you familiar with the Proustian structure of a heatwave? I thought not. You get on with the weather, relieved to find one thing so vexing and imponderable about which you have no choice, and for which you cannot be blamed. Weather is like fate, a religion without gods or judgment, in which we are all disenchanted believers: we grumble at its spite, absorb its plenty and trust that it means no harm and has no significance.

In America, one nation under God, there is a turmoil of weather. Troughs collapse exhausted in the plains. Showers are as local as Ku Klux Klan activities. In the same country at the same moment there may be people shovelling an escape from their houses through snow several feet deep, and others dazed by the heat reflected from the sea in which their feet are idling. It is a concurrence that provokes transformation, or cutting. The snowbound in New Hampshire book flights to Florida. Editing will make it better; you may dissolve into the warmth of a bonus summer. Yet even those aggrieved at the weather do not seek to alter it: weather *is*. Its variety and unpredictability are only models for the multiplicity of people and places that are American. But in so extensive a country, weather may be so infinite and prodigious it could seem chaotic and, thus, un-American.

That puts special demands on the way television handles climate. Ostensibly, the medium gives information that will benefit the way we live. Blizzards and hurricanes can be anticipated, and lives are surely saved because of that. But picnics are as vulnerable as in *Partie de Campagne*. Savage, whimsical changes are sometimes as clear-cut as *film noir* spotlights. Most of the time, TV weather is gambling and suggesting. Yet it takes up considerable air-time, and in every news report it is as worthy as Home, Overseas and Sport. The weatherman is in the studio with the other presenters. He is part of the team tableau at the beginning and end of newscasts. Moreover, in America, few TV weathermen are trained meteorologists. They are held in such respect that they need only

promote the idea of weather to the masses and MC an elaborate video extravaganza in the generally sedate news presentation.

The outstanding TV weather show in America is on the *Good Morning America* programme, the ABC, Monday to Friday, 7 a.m. to 9 a.m., breakfast magazine. The programme is anchored in New York, and the weatherman, John Coleman, is in Chicago. But the show works hard to convey

the linkage between the two centres. Coleman has five or six spots every morning—he probably fills twelve minutes in all—and he is introduced on a wall-screen first so that he can talk to the New York hosts.

Talk? He jokes, puns and flirts; he shivers and swoons to give his weather a lived-in atmosphere. He could be selling used convertibles. His aggressive suit looms in front of the Jackson Pollock weather maps like crossword puzzles on top of minestrone soup. He rattles on through his cue-card lines as back-projections ooze in and out and interval satellite pictures plot the moods of America scurrying about its business. Every morning he picks on 'a few of my favourite towns' and gives them a blurb for the day. He is remorselessly convivial. He *does* the weather as if it were an abstract idea that we all needed to have heard of in order not to be fearful of it. He's no use at all. You must still look at the sky, test the air and make up your own mind.

But Coleman has accomplished one thing. He has said, with all the vacuous, wholesome stroking that could dream up the salute 'Good Morning, America', well, here we are again, and there's weather again, and it's this or that, but it's not mean and nasty like OPEC or SALT. It's just weather, and we're all under the same sky, one great screen on which the weather movie is always playing, capricious locally perhaps, but bland because it is universal and unmotivated.



The purpose of a mass medium is to reassure the masses about their size, their unmanageable profusion, and the necessity of anonymity and stereotypes if the society is to feel itself one amiable lump rather than a Babel of conflicting self-interest and suspicious loneliness. As in disaster movies, or plague stories, everyone dreads panic in everyone else. The purpose becomes its nature, and that is why weather is the most useful analogy to be made with TV. The television set is the domestic manifestation of the sky. It is the purpose and nature of TV that it be on. The choices between one

John Coleman, the weather man on 'Good Morning America' (ABC)



network and another, one programme and another, are fallacious; TV is an on/off mechanism. There is no need, and very little reason, to watch it. You do not watch the weather; you live in it. Weather is inconceivable in the 'off' position: it's like consciousness. The television set has not yet reached that elemental low-level pressure, but it is sinking.

Our attempts to analyse particular shows are valiant. But thirty-five years of TV may have produced so little valuable criticism because the medium has bypassed reflection. The Nielsen ratings understand television better. They are a serenely independent set of numbers that ordain the awesome economics of American TV, more consistent with an energy department than a medium of entertainment. That substantial segment of our life depends on advertising revenue. It may purport to be diversion or information, but it is really a piston in the capitalist engine. Advertisers pay the set rates (as high as \$180,000 a minute), not because they like the programmes run around those spots; not even because they are confident the public enjoys them. They do not know whether the programmes are even seen—how many could

conditioning, the background chatter of others: that which we categorise as comfort or discomfort. The television set has imposed on the conventions of interior decor, making parts of the house dead ground. The sight-lines jut across space like railroad tracks. But the train need not run. I am suggesting a seemingly contradictory pact in our relationship with TV—the set should be on, for only then can we choose not to look at it. This may have enough resemblances to family life for us to call the television the company-conditioner.

So the television set is like someone lived with but not regarded. For every devout hope that the set is a meeting place for families, you can argue that it is the device that sanctions proximity without communication. You can neglect someone by concentrating on the set. But that is a risky escape for those wanting to ignore the people they live with. Concentration of any kind implies a capacity that might eventually fix on a person. The TV serves this introversion better by being turned on but not properly watched. Then we are contributing to a climate of indifference in which all people present are affected by the lowering of expectations and by the

a technological device or a prevailing wind. When prime-time series are conceived to win advertisers, so their characters become prototype consumers, indistinguishable from the role-models in commercials. Only recently, a vacancy in *Charlie's Angels* was filled by Shelley Hack, hitherto a model in perfume ads. It's reasonable, for TV series are made with a speed that only requires photogenic aptitude. Just as the ads are terse scenarios in which a life situation prompts the pilgrim into buying, so the prime-time series have presented happiness or 'feeling good' as a purchasable item. Scripts converge on it like cars drawn to the market. The sensibility of TV is very close to that of the other American novelty of the 1950s, the supermarket. In twenty-five years, the market and the kind of mall complex shown in George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* has become a recreational pursuit. Its ritual of acquisition is only an extension of the movies' strategy for participating vicariously in fantasies.

The American prime-time series today is still tuned in to the 50s and 60s: the first great age of TV has never lost its grip. So many series from that era can be re-run because they have not been outdated by newer



Shelley Hack, from modelling to *'Charlie's Angels'*; *'The Last Convertible'*, a new six-part series from a romantic novel

relate, a week or a day later, one 'story' from *Laverne and Shirley* or *Three's Company* to prove witness? No, the advertisers pay because Nielsen assures them that  $x$  million sets are turned on at such times.\* The company monitors a sample of sets, and does not enter into the question of what people felt about what was on. That surely assumes something about our experience. The responsibility makes Nielsen as powerful and as above reproach as the Bank of England. But the rationale of big money should alert us to what we are doing and not doing. Turning on the set is an affirmation, a connection or a habit, but scarcely a choice.

TV has become a domestic appliance, far more subdued than the telephone, the cooker, the meal table or the shower—things that require attention and presence—closer to the overall illumination, the level of warmth, air-

suggestion that human intercourse must now be bounced off the dulling tube. Proximity without contact, after all, is exactly the confusing privilege film and TV provide for us. TV teaches us the disinfectant role of perspex between spectator and spectacle, and we sometimes look at one another now relying on the barrier and sterility of translucent plastic separating us.

All television programmes anywhere are leaning towards that slope, but it is in America that the climate itself has become programming. The networks schedule an entire evening's viewing. They never trust us to like and find one particular programme. A broadly acceptable weather-scheme is put on, and promoted, in such a way that the different programmes seem part of a flow. Many are actual spin-offs. All of them have the same quick-laughing studio audience, interchangeable sets, narrative manoeuvres, and such identical attitudes towards life that it is no longer quite life.

This is not an essay on those attitudes, but an attempt to show how opinion and individuality on TV have become the equivalent of

products. Censorship still restrains the medium to the busy suggestiveness of the 50s. Farrah Fawcett and Susanne Somers have proved non-negotiable on the movie screen. But they resemble neo-Monroes whose ripe bodies are always testing the flimsiness of clothes. Family life is still ideologically trusted and sociologically betrayed. Crime withers on the streets at the hands of law agents who are pathologically glamorous. Within every series there is the buoyant notion that everything is all right, positive. Only that hollow surge can endure the steady counter-pressure from the ads that we are incomplete, minus and in need. Of course, that American birthright—purchase—is ready to remedy the want and put us into the tranquil nullity of I'm O.K.—You're O.K.

The attitudes are far more schematic in the ads, which amount to a short-form Bill of Hopes. There we are offered smiles to inhabit, wealth without strain or cheating, mingling without commitment, style without personality. The picture of happiness and community is dependent on the stifling of our criticism. In teaching a course on television,

\* Nielsen reports that 98% of U.S. households have at least one TV set (i.e. 73 million households). Thirty-two million households have more than one set. Top programmes have over 35 million sets tuned in. The average household-on day is 6.1 hours (1977 figures)—over 2,200 hours a year.

I found an entire class who disliked and ridiculed ads but found it improper to attack them in general because they felt the fuel of advertising was essential to the American economy.

You must not be bored with this kind of dilemma, or forget how long the TV is on in all your homes. More important, notice how the medium assists in this perversion of values. In Britain, programmes are separated, just as advertisements are signalled. There is a concession towards the moment at which an audience might turn off. There are announcers on camera, identified with the broadcasting company, who mark endings and beginnings. In America, the evening is the programme: American TV deplores gaps, despite a rhythm of interruption. Ads cut directly into programmes, challenging us to tell one high-key glow from another, or James Garner selling Polaroid from Garner in *The Rockford Files*. So much of the medium's fevered energy is spent in not letting us go. 'Stay tuned for...' is the commonest plea uttered by announcers who are never seen. They exist on tape, and they are not known to the audience. The promo spots are becoming shorter and quicker. Trailers are unintelli-

pictures? Not quite, for radio had inspired intense engagement in the listener. It is so satisfying—and so neglected now?—because it is hard work.

Close your eyes with TV, call out the shots—establishing, close-up, reaction, cutaway. Time and again, you will intuit the shooting script of the programme. The need to edit and shoot so rudimentarily has bred a rigid syntax for TV narrative as codified as the toy clouds and suns that adhere magnetically to the weather maps. To watch is to suffer the bluntness of construction. It is a relief only to listen, for the imagination is then freed a little. But while you're sitting shut-eye, hear how glibly the dialogue is a distillation of B-picture talk from the 1940s.

Radio always called for an irrational commitment in the audience. The form is tribute to the imagination, and to the way our visual creativity is stimulated. TV soaks up the visual, like a sponge: it gives off a signal more than a picture. Movies do the same, and maybe enthusiasts for film have overlooked the possibility that our imaginations need to work visually around some verbal clue if they are to approach their best. To read, to listen to radio, is to let the mind picture the evoked

No one making TV can articulate the first, harassed duty of the medium—to allay its own anxiety—but it is the way of TV that neither practitioners nor consumers examine it closely. I suspect that the core of TV militates against understanding of any kind. It speaks of pressures and submission, a kind of geological grinding of involuntary forces that could only occur if the parties involved were less than fully conscious. Television tells us that we might revert to a cultural level before critical awareness. It is not a language, a way of describing and mastering what happens to us. Instead, it offers immersion in the happening, or even an unmeasured experience in which the mainstream is *that which does not happen*.

So many aspects of the medium are negations. So much of its content surreptitiously denies our wish for eventfulness and significance, let alone drama. American TV has no drama† because the attempts at it—whether theatrical movies abridged to fit the tube, or pictures made for TV—have a scale that ensures remoteness, not experience. TV movies seem like works from the past or projects still at the Steenbeck stage; they are plans for movies, or a novel script-



Larry Hagman and Linda Grey in 'Dallas'; Johnny Carson, superman of the U.S. networks

gible but provocative. They cram lines, reactions, the roar of audience gratification in with the announcer's hype and pretty network graphics. The logic of the repeated ad is that, to avoid alienating the viewer, it must have a speed and bite that makes it cute and excusable. The superficial agitation—spasms and bubbles of colour; comic or surreal situations—should carry us over that unavoidable interruption where we might go away or opt out of the weather.

If commercials are the storms and sunbursts, that only reminds us of their vividness. I suspect we have reached the state of looking up with interest for the commercials, which rise out of the somnolent programmes. They are made to flatter short bursts of concentration; they are thirty-second movies; and their humour allows you to believe merchandising is being satirised. They also have a hotter visual temperature than anything else on TV. Which brings me to this unhappy conclusion. TV was a visual medium until attentiveness lost faith in the medium. Once the set needed only to be on, the message lay waiting that most of TV can be kept up with if one only listens. Radio with

context of the words.\* It cannot do that without passion, whereas the mind besieged with visual signals that are too small to see with pleasure may grow listless.

TV is the sum of indifference: the pictures are so basic they are unwatched. If you hesitate at that, can you deny the lack of delight or beauty in television? The sound is the worst available in any medium except the telephone, but it is the obscure link that keeps us in touch with the TV set and protected from a full appreciation of how de-energising the medium is. TV is an extension of muzak, an alternative to uneasiness, but in such a form that it furnishes the unease we may never have been conscious of without it. If you want evidence of that, consider all those sets tuned to the test-card during the ITV strike in Britain in 1979—waiting for 'them' to come back.

\* The most distressing claim against TV is that children who use it a lot seem to lose the ability to invent games of their own. Play may be closely allied to Conrad's wish for his readers—that they be made to see—something that excludes provided spectacle.

presentation for setting up the real production. TV shows us how much of the movie's appeal is in size, authority and energy. Then there are the commercials that disrupt any kind of momentum or illusion. Interruption mocks and criticises illusion. Godard knew that, but television never risks his dialectical abuse of complacent audiences. So it makes its interruptions smooth and thrilling, overlooking the contempt they show for the programme. *Holocaust* was split apart by endorsements for mouthwash and lipstick. That did more than degrade the historical subject of *Holocaust*. It belittled the ordeal and made the history more fanciful until you remembered that Fascists have always wanted to look handsome and taste good.

Even that hint of catharsis is rare. All regular TV series have sacrificed dramatic structure to regularity. A series can only survive if its central characters persist, and that alters the quality of the issues they face every week. The crises grow more specious,

† There was a great deal of live drama in the 50s. It was eliminated because the plays' pessimism or simple lack of happy endings disturbed the advertisers.

but the underlying continuity gets monolithic. Furious melodrama chases diminishing impact, and reaches a frenzy in afternoon soap operas where the naturalistic paraphernalia of sets and actors ridicules a world of hysterical plot action in which characters have returned from the dead to keep an audience sweet. Constantly stressing human values—'Oh, Brad, at last, I feel free. Hold me'—soap opera actually squanders their gravity. They are the suitable fiction for those who live alone and want to believe in the fraudulence of relationships. It makes a labyrinth, longer running than life itself, in which human beings have slipped into images and watching is a safer state than participating.

Not too far behind in finding ways to kill time are game shows and talk shows. Daytime programmes again, they allow us to see how far TV has gone beyond entertainment or diversion, and how much it is set on killing time—destroying our own space and opportunity. You cannot watch such shows without feeling the ebb of your life—the slack hold of the medium makes us despair of ourselves. The talk shows are veiled advertisements. Few people come on them to discuss anything they are not selling. Yet the pretence of an exchange of views lingers on, and supports the threat of conversation becoming only self-congratulation, barbed innuendo and laid-back preening. If that sounds alarmist, consider the way Johnny Carson has affected the style and substance of middle-aged American men for seventeen years, without ever disclosing his own self. Smartness is Carson's chronic concern: looking like a discreet dandy and emerging from any encounter with undisturbed good nature, or with that wry look at the audience that steals their inside track. His every effort to stay cool, easy-going but in charge, only flatters the audience with the humbug that he cares about their respect. The *Tonight* show is a study in anxiety striving to be typical. It makes Carson a complex role-model: he is a superman in salary and esteem, but he personifies insecurity and awkwardness trying to turn into a dry mandarin nice guy: it's Will Rogers crossed with Jack Lemmon.

Carson has no equal at easy-going authority and it puts him very close to the status of ideal candidate material, capable of winning a popular vote with 'only-kidding' put-downs for the Ayatollah and Idi Amin. The great TV personalities—always low-keyed and withdrawn to the point of disappearing—are like sunshine, and they can turn sun-tan into a philosophy. The one man on American TV identifiable for abrasive intelligence, uncompromising ideas and eloquent argument is William F. Buckley. That achievement is remarkable, no matter how mannered in gesture and conservative in policy. Buckley is tucked away on Public Broadcasting, well suited to his sanctimonious elitism and ruinous comfort to anyone inclined to believe in the difference between bad TV and a more refined alternative.

Game shows are as monotonous as prime-time series. They all have the same kind of set, a play-house built around words, numbers, cards or scoreboards. The hosts are preserved lounge lizards, but they are a little more dignified than the contenders, who seem

rehearsed in the dance of ecstasy whenever they win. Learning that routine is surely harder than knowing the answers to the questions. And someone always wins, with contrivances that we are left to imagine. The questions are as accessible as the products advertised, and they are only pretexts for the medium's most uninhibited picture of moneyed joy. Game shows are sacramental, and may be as significant in the trauma of inflation as any of Milton Friedman's fiscal diagnoses.

Game shows exploit the aphrodisiac appeal of cash. Cash-in-hand is carnal climax in a country where credit is so widespread that you have to show identification if you pay cash at a hotel. Money is flagrant and dirty. More and more often the image of it must serve as currency in a time so fearful of danger. As it is, tax eats into the body of the winnings, so that after the show some contestants have to surrender their prizes. But the moment of winning, with its associations of luck, is a nationalising of Las Vegas. If all men are equal, then gambling is the way to deal out success and failure. Game shows in which the prizes are advertised products are desperate proposals for allocating happiness among clones. Yet people who do not find television ominous say that the critics should give more credit to audiences seeing through such nonsense.

Those apologias see no harm in nonsense, and point to the balance of better things carried by the medium. That assumes that we are all very skilled at detecting and disregarding nonsense, and that there is no harm in the compromise. For myself, I think we're long past the stage when there is use in recognising harm. Harm done has become part of cultural evolution. You can no more stop or divert TV than you can 'forget' nuclear weapons. Disarmament and moderation (less viewing, better programmes and Public Broadcasting) are liberal fallacies. Television knows nothing but excess: its normal flow—its on state—is constant, and TV is often close to that in America. Everyone alive has seen much more than he or she knows or remembers.

Our average twenty-year-old has seen, or been present at, about 20,000 hours of television. We are horrified at the traces of poison in the water he drinks. We forbid him marijuana; we order that he be educated. Yet we look away from the conditioning of 20,000 hours, and still teach our children to read and write, no matter that their dominant cultural experience is one that makes the innate structures of word-play redundant. Words have to be chosen, ordered and read. Television is a system in which the human participant participates through lack of decision and recognition.

Orwell's fear of television was aimed at what 'they' would do with it. The iniquities of those who run television—payola, subliminal advertising, or doctoring the news—are no worse than the sins of other institutions. You may choose to distort news or neglect Cambodia and Paraguay. But there is a structural limitation in the premise that the news runs 22½ minutes, and is to be read and tamed by the paternalism of Walter Cronkite or David Brinkley. Far more damaging is the principle that a news story is what television classifies as news. Thus the news can only occur where there are cameras; and wherever

there are cameras sooner or later news will break out. Yet it must also be amenable to short presentation, and it must permit illustration—that may soon be the largest purpose of political leaders in bureaucratic systems. From seeing presidents as leaders unduly shaped by TV, we have recognised that the president presents the picture of leadership to the national audience. He is the man who goes on television periodically, with the aura of sublime control. It is very close to the role of the royal family in Britain, or of the weather man on TV. The news on TV is so forceful a calming device that it leaves only marginal scope for editors or censors. The debility of TV news exists in its placebo manipulation of meaning. The danger is in submitting to it, for it brings out the worst in the audience, not in the controllers.

Yet to reject it now is an act of austere eccentricity and wilful alienation. It is also no more than cosy anxiety to forbid a TV set but to abide otherwise by the national system that is so reliant on television. I know parents who have made that decision for their children, and who are regarded as unusually conscientious and wise. If they confined their children to the house, the law would intervene. Children have a right to fresh air and weather. Deprive them of that and they will grow up estranged from their world. And TV is now their world; not a window on it, but the adoption of the window as a part of consciousness. If too many were so deprived then mass citizenship might disintegrate. Language was one way of saying 'we are common' to one another. And with more of us, so the form must be more sweeping, more translucent, less real. TV is the logical form for our culture exactly because it is so total and simultaneously so indifferent and so demented. If you turn it off, you turn yourself off—you put yourself apart from your fellows. That may be holy and inspired. But it could be monstrous and tyrannical.



Weather would be intolerable to reason if we believed the gods designed it as warning or reward. We have to live in it mute and helpless, all under the same unstable sky. Television urges a similar insignificance upon us, which is depressing if you have been brought up on Mozart, Dickens and Renoir, who ennoble audiences. But those masters of the humanist tradition believed in doubt, the state of mind that surrounds acts of choice and discrimination. Maybe societies as diffuse as ours, and as perilously placed, are bound to fear doubt. The tyranny of confidence is not the most comfortable alternative, and certainly not as respectable as the equanimity and unflawed resignation with which we face the weather. Television is a substantial step away from dealing with reality and the first medium to encourage careless watching. It may be seen historically as the moment at which we ceased to live in reality, and preferred the position of spectators at a lifelike fantasy. But that process was launched by movies, and before that by photography. Television has made itself essential as a support system to our weakness or vacancy. That may be a crucial relaxing of a culture in which we lived. Instead, it poses one in which the imagination is as huge and as out-of-reach as climate. We have moved back towards primitivism. ■

# OUT OF THE PAST!

When Eduardo de Gregorio, Argentinian exile in Paris, notable chiefly for his collaboration with Jacques Rivette as a scriptwriter, made his striking debut as a director in 1975 with *Sérail*, it could jokingly be said that this bizarrely tortuous tale of a house's carnivorous love for a man might almost have served as a coming attraction at the 'cinema' discovered by the two girls in the mysterious mansion of *Céline et Julie*. By contrast, de Gregorio's second film *La Mémoire Courte* (1979)—a journey of fear into the labyrinths of Fascist conspiracy conducted by a young woman whose parents bought Jewish property cheap during the Occupation, and a young man whose parents were wealthy O.A.S. activists—might almost have been a variation on the Borgeesian torments of *The Spider's Stratagem*. Taken together, the two films in fact demonstrate the importance of de Gregorio's contribution in his collaborations with Bertolucci (*The Spider's Stratagem*) and Rivette (*Céline et Julie*, *Duelle*, *Noroît*).

Here Eduardo de Gregorio talks not only about his own films and scripts, but also more generally about some of the problems and attitudes involved in making films in France today.

EDUARDO DE GREGORIO: I suppose *La Mémoire Courte* relates to my past in a way that perhaps *Sérail* didn't. In a sense the film came out of the feeling that a situation I had escaped from a dozen years ago in Argentina was repeating itself in Europe, that a certain kind of right-wing presence was becoming much more open and obvious in Europe today. In that sense it was supposed to be two

things: my personal experience as a child and adolescent, and my present situation in Europe, which coincide at a point where I see, with all the difference that you can imagine, a similar political climate.

**How do you see Fascism functioning now in the European technocratic society?**

The problem is that the idea of Fascism

## An Interview with Eduardo de Gregorio

Jim Hillier and Tom Milne

today—Fascism in the widest possible sense—doesn't correspond to what Fascism was historically. I don't just equate technocracy and Fascism, but I think there is in Europe now a revival of right-wing attitudes which are trying to make themselves acceptable culturally, to suggest that the right has something to say about the present situation in a way that has been impossible

'La Mémoire Courte'



since the Second World War. This seems to me quite new, and there are many symptoms. There is a revival of anti-Semitism, of theories of inequality, which hadn't been openly developed in public until two or three years ago. And the big difference, of course, is that all this is now done through the media.

**Is this less a revival of Fascism than a weakening of active resistance to it? Are you making a reaffirmation of resistance? The hero of *La Mémoire Courte* acts and fails, in a sort of echo of the old leftist resistance; but the heroine acquires a certain moral strength.**

Frank Barila (Philippe Léotard) doesn't represent the left. In fact, if there is something not represented in the film it is the left. There is no political stand there at all. And Judith Mesnil (Nathalie Baye) is as much in a political vacuum as many people today. No, what I wanted was to make a film about the inheritance of Fascism in personal terms. So I chose two characters whose pasts are related to different kinds of Fascism. Their inheritance of family guilt, their fear that they could have been like their parents, means that they can't speak for the left at any moment. I don't pretend to.

**But one of the striking things about the film is that you leave the revelation of their past involvement in Fascism until very late, so that instead of having people who are trying to correct something, as it were, one almost feels that their past is conjured by what they find out.**

Yes... What I wanted was—it's mainly about Judith, who I think is more or less the real protagonist—to have a character who would be empty enough for a good part of the film for the audience to identify with her eventually, though the identification would only take shape as the film progressed. Perhaps in terms of traditional dramaturgy it was a mistake not to have presented her earlier, who she was and why she was doing what she was doing. But you are right: she is conjuring her past because for her it has been forgotten, erased. During the first half of the film, in fact, I deliberately try to show her as someone who has rejected the past and started a new life. Frank's case is different, because he acts out of revenge.

**In using the thriller form, you deliberately defuse one of the main characteristics of the genre: the suspense.**

Yes, because the fundamental thing in a *film noir* plot—who done it?—is in a sense of no importance here. Monsieur Mann is eventually unmasked, but so what, in effect? I try to build up suspense and to respect the rules of the genre, and then erase them. Judith gets into this investigation like a detective, only to discover that there was no reason for the investigation because the mystery is public. That's why I wanted two very naive characters, because somebody more politically sophisticated would obviously never have become involved. I see them a bit as babes in the wood, lost and trying to reconstruct their way out of the past, even if it is apparent to them at the end that this past is also the present.

**Was this why the kiss between them is so tentative? Although Nathalie Baye and Philippe Léotard are husband and wife in real life, you seem to avoid any expression of feeling between them.**

When she tries to kiss him, it seemed to me like a gesture towards being closer, not erotic at all, more a childish approach, like holding hands. Because in a way the film goes backwards, they regress. He does anyway. And the last flashback is shot so as to give you the impression that it is seen through the eyes of a child. I felt that if I developed an erotic aspect there the film would have gone in another direction, which would have nothing to do with their obsessive quest for their own pasts. There is also the fact that no real relationship exists between them, except one of suspicion. When Judith is in her own flat, lounging around in a T-shirt and panties—this was something Nathalie suggested—it wasn't meant to be erotic, but to indicate something infantile about her behaviour which would contrast with her very adult manner in her professional life.

**Does this regression culminate in the identikit portrait of her with which the film ends?**

I didn't see it that way. It could be, but for me that describes an opposition between a private image and the public image that society finally gives her. Her story, which is meant to be a very oblique and individual one, is finally reduced to this identikit portrait on the newscasts when Frank, after his attempt to kill the industrialist Monsieur Mann, is assumed to be a terrorist, and she is merely his mysterious associate. For me, that scene is shaped as a sort of pendant to the opening sequence in which we see her as an anonymous translator dealing with the kind of generalised stuff about the world situation you get in UNESCO speeches. So you have on the one hand these public images, and on the other this very individual voyage of discovery through the facts.

**A problem from an audience point of view may be that we don't see much of this public face of Fascism as a counterpoint to the quest of your two heroes.**

Because it's very diluted, Fascism today. It takes the form of people who say, 'We're not racist, but if you read the new discoveries in biology...' or 'We're not against progress, but...' They're serving up the old dish but with a different sauce. What's new is this normalisation, this banalisation of right-wing attitudes. The film doesn't deal with a Fascist movement, although they never really disappeared after the war. What Frank and Judith are looking for is precisely this old-fashioned image of Fascism, which is why I use the *film noir* framework. But what they in fact discover is that the *film noir* framework isn't useful any more because the monsters they are looking for don't exist as such. I think this distinction between the old and new images of Fascism is made clear enough at the end when Frank and Judith confront Monsieur Mann, and after first denying his involvement he says in effect (through his wife), 'Well, even if I were all these men you say I am, who cares?' This is a form of Fascism too, saying that the past can be justified, or isn't worth caring about. So the film is in no way a statement about Fascism in its various aspects in Europe today; it's more like a very subjective view through a personal story.

While preparing the script, I was thinking about the Rossellini movies of the 50s, in particular the Ingrid Bergman ones, where

you had a sense of crisis. I saw *Europa 51* again after completing *La Mémoire Courte*, and you can see what Rossellini thought about the attitude of the Italian Communist Party, about the relationship between public and private life, about work as an absolute social value. It was a brave film, very controversial at the time (neither the capitalists nor the communists were ready to accept the notion that work is slavery), but you cannot say that it makes an objective statement about any of these problems: it is all filtered through one sensibility, which is a very subjective one. It seemed to me that to make *La Mémoire Courte* a generic liberal statement, another *Marathon Man* or *Boys from Brazil*, was not enough, and also means that your hands are clean, that you have nothing to do with it. For instance, in *All the President's Men*, journalism is presented as being absolutely distinct from the intrigue that is uncovered. There is an idea of neutrality or opposition, whereas in my film the heroes are burdened with guilt, they could have become like their parents, like Monsieur Mann (who is, in a sense, their parents). If there is an audience problem with the film, it is because it demands a very active participation; the fundamental point is that it is up to the audience themselves what moral and emotional attitude they adopt at the end.

**There has been a lot of discussion about attempts to do political subjects through the thriller form, and how far the form itself acts as a distraction. Were there other reasons for your choice of the thriller?**

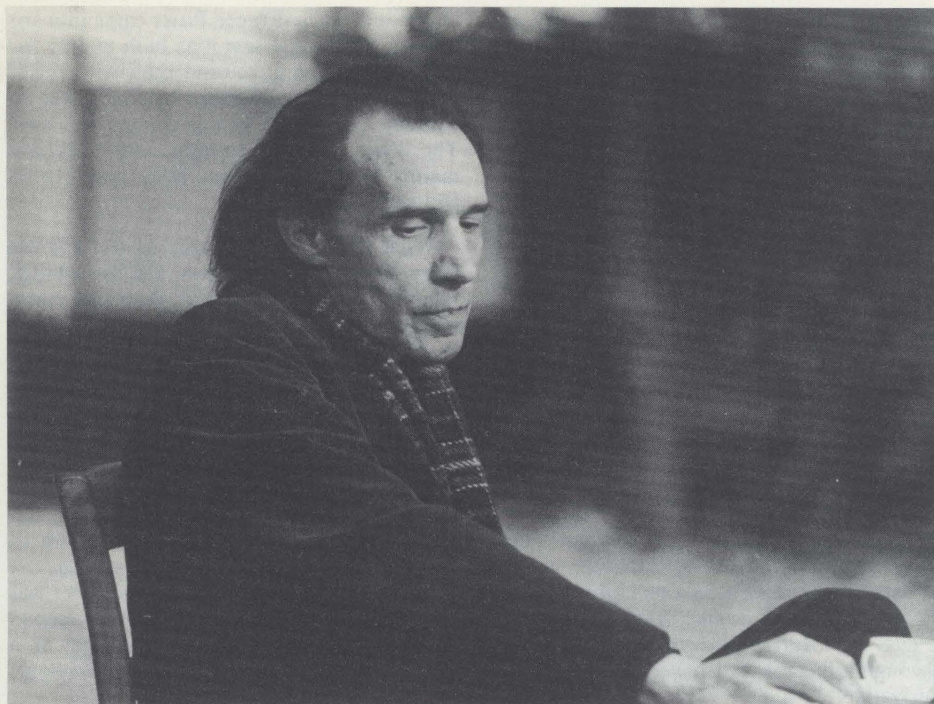
It seems to me that the thriller form, like the Western, is not culturally imposed on cinema but developed from the idea of narrative cinema, and so naturally related to it. And just as the Western is related to narrative cinema mainly in terms of space, so the *film noir* is related to it mainly in terms of time—*films noir* are like voyages of discovery in one way or another. Since politics for me are related to time and memory, it wasn't an arbitrary decision to use the thriller form.

**Which is also concerned with discovering the truth, attempting to make sense...**

Yes, although when reality finally makes sense in *La Mémoire Courte*, it isn't according to the terms of the past, but in a new way.

**Is this sense of not quite making sense why you so often have faces in shadow, for no particular reason?**

Mainly because that was the rule with most *films noir*, though it has been abandoned since colour came in. I wanted to make a film which would look like a *film noir* in colour. This is why I used Fujicolor, because I think this is much more difficult to achieve in Eastman Colour. The dominant in Eastman is yellow and red, whereas in Fuji it's blue, and this seemed to me better suited to a film which wanted to present a very cold world. Also, Fuji is much more sensitive, so you can shoot at night and see much more than you would get with Eastman with the same amount of light. I didn't want the audience to see everything, so this balance was important: not too much lighting yet seeing a lot, but still conveying the feeling of a lack, that each thing is something more than is there. In a Bresson film, say, you see everything, but it's through the handling of the actors or the editing that you get this feeling of...



unbalance and lack. Since I wasn't interested in trying to achieve effects by those means, I thought that lighting and colour would be more interesting.

**If *Sérail* developed partly out of your work on *Céline et Julie*, *La Mémoire Courte* seems more closely related to Bertolucci and your script for *The Spider's Stratagem*?**

Well, yes . . . obviously, in so far as both films deal with the image of a guilty father and an inheritance of guilt. But the point Bernardo was making in *The Spider's Stratagem* was that, no matter what public position the hero assumes at the end, he is trapped by the past and cannot escape from it. In *Mémoire Courte* the film is saying that the past is there, and is very similar to today's situation, but at the same time everything is completely different. Frank Barila is as trapped by the past as Bertolucci's hero; but with Judith's character I tried to convey the idea that she is somehow getting out of that situation. We don't know what will happen to her, but can imagine that, inasmuch as she has become a public figure, she will be forced to do something—whether by writing about it, by simply being aware, or whatever. Most people are not aware. When Monsieur Mann's wife tells Frank and Judith that they needn't bother because everybody knows, in fact it's not true. People may know the present situation, but they don't relate it to the past. The general attitude today is to forget the past. Of course to be aware is no solution, but the film doesn't pretend to offer solutions.

**Although *Sérail* and *La Mémoire Courte* can be distinguished in terms of your association with Rivette and Bertolucci, there's also the common denominator of you. Does one get back to a further common denominator of Borges? You're both Argentinian, you've studied under Borges, you've worked on a Borges film with Bertolucci, Rivette's *Paris nous appartient* refers to Borges . . .**

All I can say is that I've accepted Borges as a cultural fact and that he seems to represent Argentinian culture, which is a sort of composite. I've never rejected Borges, the way some people have, for not representing the truly 'national' Argentine culture which people have been seeking for a hundred years. Borges is more representative of Argentina than the purely folkloric writers or those adopting Third World attitudes. For instance, in a film like *Hour of the Furnaces*, there is a very specific position against colonised culture and a desire for a national identity previous to, and different from, this imposed culture. But it doesn't exist. The image that Solanas sets up against decadent foreign influences is the image of the 'gaucho', Martin Fierro, and so on; but as everyone knows Fierro is the invention of a civilised society. In the sense that Borges mixes different elements from different cultures, I feel I inherit something from him. But although he has influenced me, so have others.

I'm very suspicious when people talk about colonised cultures, particularly in relation to Argentina, because there hasn't been anything except colonised culture. There's a

*'La Mémoire Courte': Jacques Rivette; Philippe Léotard and Nathalie Baye. Eduardo de Gregorio*

rather pernicious, racist assumption that certain people are the rightful inheritors of certain cultures. I don't see why Argentinians shouldn't be the inheritors of many elements of English or French or American culture as much as others are, especially today. Borges wrote somewhere that we Argentinians, though poorer of course, were also richer in the sense that our tradition was wider. In any case, this problem has been modified by reality, by the media: everyone today can read more or less what everyone else does.

#### **How did you come to work in Italy after leaving Argentina?**

I left Argentina at the end of 1966 because I wanted to make movies and that had become almost impossible. There had been a short-lived new Argentinian cinema at the beginning of the 1960s simply because a quota stipulated that a certain number of Argentinian films should be shown. That law was changed in the mid-60s when the American majors managed to eliminate Argentinian competition. In 1966 there was the military coup d'état and intervention at the university, where I was studying philosophy. I'd had enough, so I left.

First I came to London, then I moved briefly to Paris, then Rome. I think I went to Italy because I'm mainly of Italian origin and thought I'd feel closer to things there. In Rome I quickly related to some young critics who had just begun a new magazine, *Cinema e Film*, an attempt to do what *Cahiers du Cinéma* was doing. Through them I made contact with young directors, like Bertolucci, and scripted a first film by a critic, Maurizio Ponzi, *I Visionari*. Then Bertolucci asked me to write *The Spider's Stratagem* with him and Marilù Parolini. About that time I realised that one place *wasn't* like any other and that in fact I didn't relate to the Roman experience or to Italian feelings about cinema. So when I got an offer from Jean-Louis Comolli to write what became *La Cecilia*, I decided to move to Paris, because I had the impression that the view of cinema there was more cosmopolitan. At that time I had an idea of cinema—very much dependent, I think, on ideological assumptions of the 1960s—as a kind of universal language. You have to remember that at the time 'international' films weren't just the fashion, they seemed to represent something, the idea that cinema could go beyond purely local concerns. Then I discovered that was a fallacy. In fact, you're very much bound by your past. I had to invent, or rather rediscover, my own tradition, my own past.

#### **How did the offer from Comolli arise?**

I'd been collaborating with *Cahiers* in a peripheral way and I was friendly with them. Comolli had discovered the existence of this anarchist colony in Brazil at the end of the nineteenth century. He asked if I could write a script. At the Biblioteca Gramsci in Rome I found the book written by Rossi, the commune's founder. I began there and wrote a first story treatment, then rewrote it with Comolli. The film took a long time to set up, I got involved in other projects and Comolli rewrote it with Marianne Di Vettimo.

#### **You don't like the film much. Was your original treatment changed?**

Perhaps I'd feel differently if I saw the film again now, but it seemed to me too much like

an ideological discussion, an intelligent one dealing with some questions important for the French or European left in the mid-1970s, but dealing with them in a very abstract way. I don't see enough contradictions in the film to satisfy me. I remember feeling happier with the first half, where the purely physical problems of setting up a commune are shown, and more dissatisfied with the second half, where the quarrels about the women were originally much more fully developed. That seemed to me fundamental because the idea of free love is a basic principle of anarchism and it sustained the fantasy of the commune. I felt it was dealt with somewhat superficially in the film.

#### **Was *I Visionari* a political film?**

Not at all. It was about a group of actors who stage a Musil play. I haven't seen it for many years, but I think it was very much part of one of the traditions of European cinema of that period, theatre as a metaphor for life. In the mid-60s films like *L'Amour Fou* and *L'Une et l'Autre* tried to explore cinema through a metaphor. I remember it as rather derivative.

#### **Then *La Cecilia* appears to be an exception in your work in being more directly concerned with political questions. It was shown here as a political film by The Other Cinema, which is unlikely to be interested in showing your other films.**

Its 'specialisation' bothered me a bit. What I dislike in the traditional political film is that it's something *different*. For me *La Cecilia* was very much a fictional film, not only because it was telling a story, but because it was about people who created a fiction for themselves, and that's what interested me most. But, of course, I don't claim these films as mine. *La Cecilia* is Comolli's film, and Bertolucci's and Rivette's films are theirs. Obviously there were certain elements I could bring to them, like the theatrical framework and the use of Buchner in *La Cecilia*.

#### **How did the connection with Rivette come about?**

We had met through *Cahiers*, he'd seen *Spider's Stratagem* and liked it very much, and he asked me to collaborate with him and Suzanne Schiffman on a project called *Phénix*, a film for Jeanne Moreau, based loosely on *The Phantom of the Opera*. We wrote a long treatment, but it was a period piece and too expensive, so the film collapsed just a few weeks before shooting was to begin. Rivette decided we could try to make something else. So, very quickly, *Céline et Julie* came into being. It started with two ideas: Rivette wanted to make a film with Juliet Berto—she was supposed to play a part in *Phénix*. Juliet brought in Dominique Labourier, a close friend of hers, and Rivette started with the idea of making a film about two young women in Paris during the summer, a comedy. Then he felt he needed a counterweight, another world in which the two women would get involved, to balance the comedy. We looked for something to give us a plot—complicated but not of too great importance—and Michael Graham suggested I read a Henry James play, *The Other House*. I read it, suggested the idea to Rivette, and he liked it, because immediately he thought of using two other actresses as mirrors of the two young women, and at that moment Bulle

Ogier and Marie-France Pisier came into the project. So Rivette saw it as built mainly for Juliet and Dominique, and built with them. He was thinking of Renoir, I think, a Renoir comedy about two young women in Paris. The other aspect I brought, and I worked mainly with Rivette and Bulle and Marie-France.

#### **What about *The Romance of Old Clothes* story, also by Henry James, and the subtitle, 'Phantom Ladies over Paris'. Does that relate to *Phantom Lady*?**

Rivette had read the story and thought he could incorporate it. Of course, it became something else, but that's the way he works. 'Phantom Ladies' was Rivette's idea, because once we had accepted the notion of this other film, he thought of it as a kind of pastiche of the RKO mystery films of the 40s. He has spoken in other interviews about depth of focus and very heavily post-expressionist lighting—this was the idea. I think he was surprised that most people saw this second world not so much as a pastiche but as a parody, which wasn't his original intention.

#### **Was it this experience that made you want to develop ideas about role-playing in *Sérail*?**

I've always been fascinated by role-playing, but I think I was also following something Rivette once said, which I think is true but unwise to say in public. He said that if he were in charge of French cinema, he'd give all directors the same three subjects, because films are always about just two or three things. In other words, let's copy, because that's the only way of being different. So when I made *Sérail* I had this idea—a bad idea, I think now—of deciding to take that world which had been developed in a certain direction in *Céline et Julie* and develop it in another direction which would interest me more. I think that was a mistake purely from the point of view that the more 'original' you are, the more people respect you. I also had the idea that since I was a screenwriter, I wanted to make a '*mise en scène* film' where the script would be one element among others, and would become more or less erased because other qualities or elements would become as important as the plot. I don't think that came off completely, but it was a serious undertaking. I now feel that the literary aspect of *Sérail* is too heavy and the visual side underdeveloped. I wanted a film where the house would be much more *present* than it is now. But it was my first film, and I needed two weeks more shooting. It's very important to have enough time, and I didn't.

#### **You've spoken before about 'technical' problems, things you wanted to do but found weren't possible, such as, in *Sérail*, to be constantly moving the camera, or to use an unsqueezed CinemaScope image of the house at the end. Do those problems constantly interpose themselves, things you just can't achieve either technically or in the time available?**

I think it's an aspect of movie-making that's very much missing in film criticism. Also, of course, nobody wants to say he has failed. It's not a question of virtuosity, it's just that very often one doesn't achieve exactly what one wanted. Sometimes you achieve something different which can be very interesting, and sometimes you don't achieve that different thing. You have to be

very careful about the terms in which you talk about this question, because one of the problems of French cinema now is that what the commercial system says of the independents is that these people don't know how to make movies. Without wanting to appear reactionary, it's important to say that sometimes the lack of means *is* a problem.

**Something else that's perhaps difficult to talk about: does the long gap between *Sérail* and *La Mémoire Courte* create its own pressures?**

A three-year gap. Yes, one needs to work to progress. Since I had a kind of cinephile education, seeing films is for me also a way of working, but let's not exaggerate! But it wasn't only for financial reasons that after *Sérail* I wanted to keep working as a screenwriter, especially with Rivette, where the experience of screenwriting is very special, since you write the script while you're shooting. It's a way of working and progressing.

**You didn't have that kind of relationship with Bertolucci?**

No, I didn't follow the shooting, though I visited. Afterwards I wanted to be closer to the problems of shooting. I asked to assist Bertolucci and was second assistant on *The Conformist*, but I was so bad I left after a month. It's the wrong way to learn anything about cinema—you just do all the awful work no one else wants to do.

**You had a script ready to shoot, *Sentimental Journey*, but you didn't manage to get it off the ground and made *La Mémoire Courte* instead. Will you still make that script some time?**

That script, one among several others being worked on at the same time, has already been rewritten four times. Each time I find it's not what I want any more and it has to be rewritten. It's possible that rewriting it for the fifth time I'll say I'm crazy, I don't want to make this. I suppose that happens to every director who is his own writer. The notion of 'auteurs' is one I'm very suspicious of now. Let's put it this way: in the market in France today everybody's an auteur, in the more superficial meaning of the word, and I don't see any interest in claiming that. If you want to say you're an auteur, then you should have the means to be one. I think the two extremes of the spectrum—Coppola on one side, Straub on the other—can say they are auteurs, because they produce their own movies. The fact that you write a script and direct it yourself doesn't make you an auteur, not if you have to make the film with half the budget you needed; because obviously somewhere, somehow, something has interfered very strongly with your intentions.

The positions of Straub and Coppola are exceptional ones. I'm in between, not in qualitative terms, but in terms of my position in the market; and I think that the fight for one's own material is very impoverishing, it's one of the reasons why contact with reality seems rather missing in a certain kind of French cinema. The 'politique des auteurs' was historically useful, but not any more. It was interesting when there were strong personalities involved, as a sort of disruptive presence within a much more even, assembly line kind of production. Now it's the auteur films which are made on an assembly line, but the auteurs themselves don't know it. Part of



'*Sérail*': Marie-France Pisier, Corin Redgrave

the vitality of French cinema came from the possibility of relating to an audience, even if that audience was small. Whereas nowadays I feel that the increasing need to make what I call 'cultural institution' cinema may be all right in theory, but there is a loss in vitality.

**You mean that films for television become 'commodities'?**

Yes, because television films—either the 'teledrama' or the 'art film' made in association with television-related institutions, like INA (L'Institut National de l'Audio-Visuel)—are films, fundamentally, for the media people themselves, the people who will give their approval or not, because the presence of the audience is not something they really have to think about. And that bothers me. Now, television is a fact, I'm not saying one should say no to it, but when Straub says that *History Lessons* has been seen by three million people, and he compares that with *The Conformist*, which was seen in Paris by about 200,000 people, he's crazy. The contract is completely different—going to the cinema and *paying* is a very important gesture, and not just financially, it's a real gesture. Whereas everything that's seen on television is seen and not seen at the same time. I don't want to generalise that films made for television or for cultural institutions are uninteresting, but I still have perhaps an old-fashioned idea of an audience, of reaching people who have not thought about what you're trying to do and will be enriched by it. Whereas very often now cinema seems like a repetition of something people know before they get into the cinema.

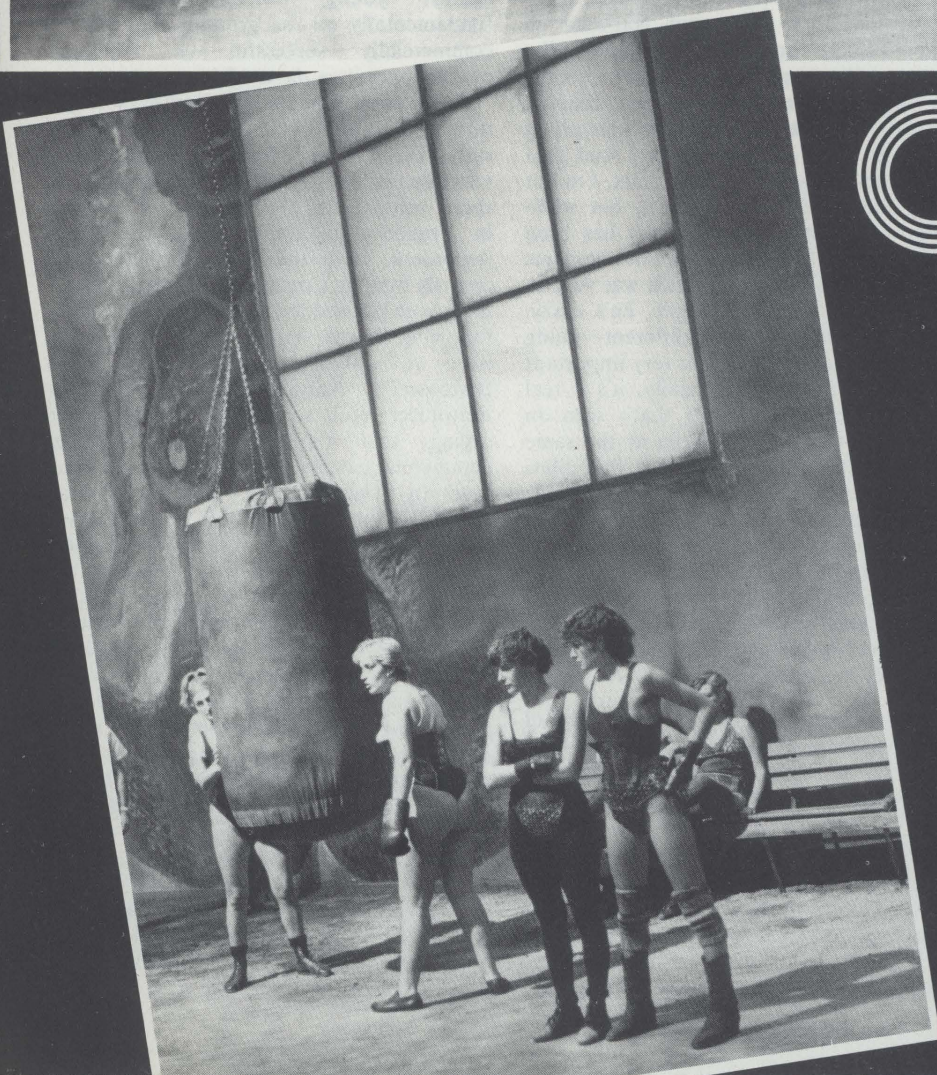
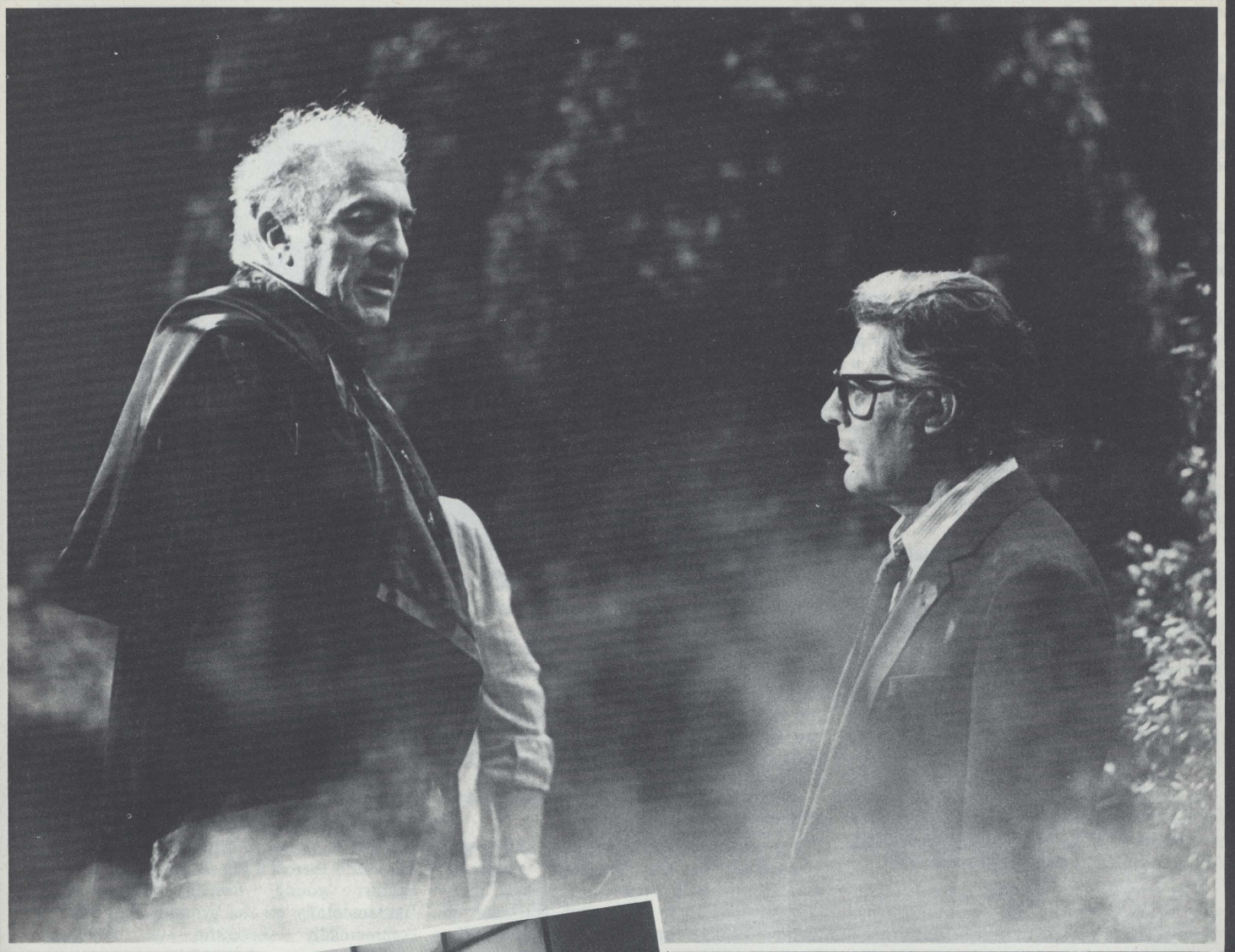
**In the French cinema now, what kind of space exists for someone like you, making films for neither a mass audience nor a highly specialised one? How easy is it to get films set up?**

It's very difficult. These films aren't necessary in any way. Theoretically the American model appears ideal to the French industry: on one side big commercial projects you can invest in and expect to be financially viable, and on the other side the avant garde,

marketable through the museums. But I don't think that model can correspond to the reality in France. It is true that in France there has been a tradition of auteurs, of personalities, and in that sense I suppose there's some interest in, or respect for, products which don't coincide either with the avant garde or with the big commercial cinema. But it's becoming more difficult because the market in Paris is saturated with products of every kind, and there's a big ideological campaign against 'young' French cinema now, fundamentally on the grounds that it's not commercially successful—the American model appears as the model.

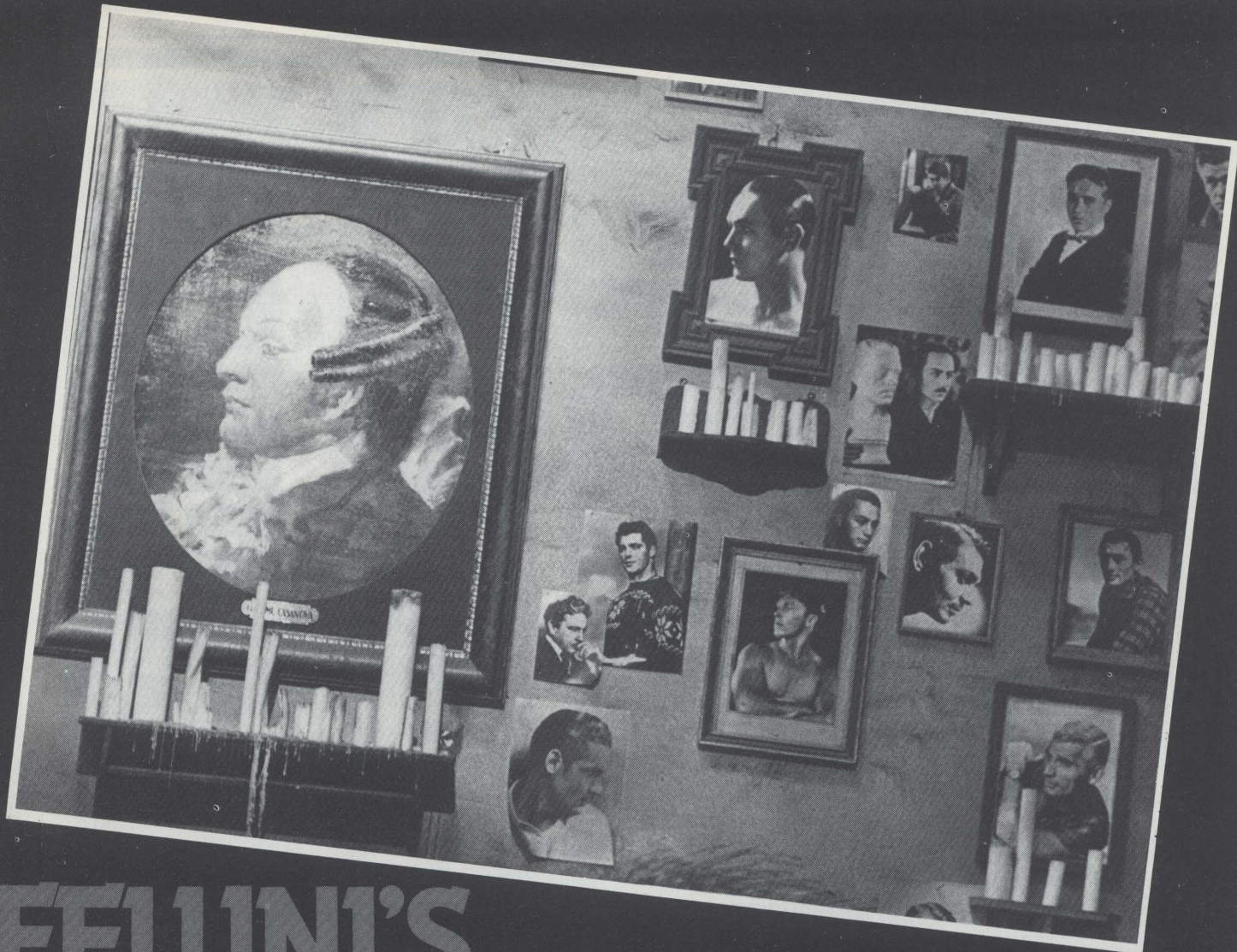
At the same time, the continuing respect for this other kind of cinema makes France rather exceptional in Europe. In Italy there's virtually nothing left. For the last two or three years now, the Italian films shown in France—I'm not thinking of Fellini, Antonioni, Bertolucci, but of the average comedy by Risi, Comencini, Monicelli, etc.—have been praised as the model we should be following. I was very glad that in a recent issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND* ('The Other Bertolucci', Autumn 1979), Giuseppe Bertolucci said something I felt needed saying: that it's that kind of average commercial cinema which has killed another kind. In France today, when success is an absolutely fundamental value, the industry is trying to kill off the other, independent cinema. There's less money; most of the independent producers have gone back to what they hope are safe commercial projects.

Two or three years ago Stéphane Tchaladjieff was making Rivette's *Noroît* and *Merry Go Round*, Bresson's *Le Diable, probablement*, Benoît Jacquot's *Les Enfants du Placard*; now he's making a 'comédie à sketches' directed by Molinaro, Yves Robert, Claude Zidi *et al.* Les Films du Losange were making films by Rohmer and Barbet Schroeder, now they're making *La Dame aux Camélias* with Isabelle Huppert and directed by Bolognini... I don't blame them, they have to survive, but it gives some idea of the problem in trying to set up anything that strays from the beaten track.



CITY OF





# FELLINI'S WOMEN

Federico Fellini's new film, in which Marcello Mastroianni (above left, with the director, and below) embarks on a dream excursion into a world of modern women—and of course, this being a Fellini film, childhood memories.

Photographs: Deborah Imogen Beer



# INTERTITLES

William F. Van Wert

Almost as a compensation for the lack of sound, the silent cinema built up an elaborate system of visual coding based primarily on typage and montage. The 'absent' sound remained an issue, however, and many critics discussed the ways in which the cinema could approximate sound (music, rhythm, tempo) visually. For the most part, this approximated sound had nothing to do with speech and the representation of verbal language in film. Obviously, people did not come to the cinema to read the printed word on screen. In fact, credit titles were not an important concern in the early days of the cinema. There is no dispute with the fact that a sophisticated camera- and editing-consciousness were silent film's haunting legacy to the sound film. And it has become fashionable in recent years to 'read' silent films by way of the coding in the photographed images, the stylised gestures and calculated cutting, as though the written words of the intertitles were some kind of implied burden on the film-makers and an eye-sore embarrassment for the modern spectator, who tends to read them as quickly as possible and then sits impatiently, waiting for the next visual and wondering why the titles last so long on the screen.

Some of the critical neglect of the intertitles in silent films has been, no doubt, deliberate, in order to emphasise film's independence from literature. 'Pure' cinema was intended to be a cinema of images, whose complex visual coding would be self-sufficient, a language separate from both literature and photography. Carl Dreyer was praised for his 'interior language' and his sparing use of intertitles. Carl Mayer was praised for the 'Kammerspiel' films he scripted, which made no use whatsoever of intertitles. Fernand Léger called his *Ballet Mécanique* (1924) the 'first film without a scenario'. This kind of

aversion to the intertitle as something essentially anti-cinematic stemmed naturally from the early training in the theatre shared by many of the foremost directors. Griffith's quotations from the Bible in *Intolerance* (1916), Eisenstein's dynamic and typographical arrangements of intertitles in *Strike* (1924) and *The Battleship Potemkin* (1926) and Dziga-Vertov's political slogans and historical quotations were seen as interesting aberrations. With the gratitude of hindsight, we dismiss the fact that D. W. Griffith's first ambition was to be a writer and that Eisenstein wished to translate Russian folk

idioms into film and use the intertitles as an essential part of a dialectical montage.

Some of our misunderstanding of and impatience with the intertitles in silent films stems from our own assumptions and expectations. We assume, first of all, that those titles function primarily as representations of verbal speech. And, whereas we suspend disbelief and expect the marvellous from the images, we approach the intertitles as pure data:

'Historically, it's the "verbal" function of the intertitles that is most frequent and most well-known. In a representational-realist optics, these dialogue titles are accepted to the degree that they are logically anticipated; but then, they function as substitutes for the spoken word, and they only underscore even more that designated absence as something missing.\*'

The result of this split between the image and the text for that image is a split reading, in which each spectator takes his/her own intonations and inferences from the intertitles and applies them to an interpretation of the image:

'Each spectator reads the subtitles in his/her own way, imposing personal intonations into this reading. Each one (I would like to think), by reading the subtitle in his/her own way, participates in fact in the making of the film.' (Dovzhenko, quoted by Michel Marie.)

This view of complete personal freedom in

\*Michel Marie, 'Muet', in *Lectures du Film* (Paris: Editions Albatros, 1975).



'The Battle at Elderbush Gulch': Indian horsemen surround the beleaguered cabin

applying non-codified intertitles to the more codified visuals implies a kind of spectator anarchy, however, which is belied by the filmmakers most conscious of their craft, whose structural use of the intertitles was both diverse and specific. I propose to study the function of the intertitles and their specific interaction with the image in a cross-section of films from the silent era: Griffith's *The Battle at Elderbush Gulch* (1914), Pudovkin's *Mother* (1926), Eisenstein's *Potemkin* (1926), Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920), Léger's *Ballet Mécanique* (1924), Man Ray's *Les Mystères du Château de Dés* (1929) and Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (1930). Implicit in this particular cross-section of films is the assumption that the differences in function in their intertitles are both aesthetic and ideological.

### The Battle at Elderbush Gulch

The first thing one notices about the intertitles in Griffith's two-reel Western is that they all contain the title of the film at the top and Biograph's A&B insignia at the bottom. This apparent cluttering of each title card serves no aesthetic purpose whatsoever: the information is 'neutral' data. And yet the repetition of title and insignia on every title card serves an ideological function, symptomatic of the commercial system in which

Griffith rose to the top and fell into obscurity: it prevents the 'duping' of the film. Authorship becomes an issue here. While Griffith 'authored' the printed information in the middle of each title card, the studio 'owned' the top and bottom. The spectator, however, 'reads' everything, forced to deal with both Griffith's print and the studio's imprint, the one furthering the narrative, the other serving as a kind of copyright. Furthermore, the number of perforations per frame indicates an added authorship: 'Both titles and subtitles were shot on a camera other than the Biograph camera which perforated its own film and made only one hole per frame.'<sup>\*</sup>

The wonder is that Griffith was able to pack so much into each title card, since his space was so limited. This point is worth emphasising, especially in comparison with someone like Eisenstein, who had complete authorship over his own titles, with the added space to experiment both with their arrangement and relative size, as in the repeated title of 'BROTHERS!' in *Potemkin*, the voice 'expanded' as the title is enlarged. The result was that Eisenstein was able to fuse aesthetics and ideology much more successfully than Griffith.

And yet Griffith shows an amazing mastery of the intertitles and their effect upon the

visuals in *The Battle at Elderbush Gulch*. The film opens with a title, not a visual, and the title is structurally arranged to emphasise 'orphans' in the first line, 'uncle' in the second line and 'Elderbush Gulch' in the last line:

THE ORPHANS LEAVE  
TO JOIN THEIR UNCLE AT  
ELDERBUSH GULCH

The first visual then shows Virgie Clarke clinging to Mae Marsh in the centre of the frame, 'sandwiched' by the fat woman in the left foreground who turns away from them and by the man who drives them away and whose back is turned, his shoulders and head appearing over the top of Mae Marsh's hat. By emphasising key words in each line, Griffith's intertitle serves two functions: it informs the viewer, in terms of the narrative, of what is about to occur, and it sets the mood for the following images. In medium shot, both the driver and Mae Marsh are looking off to their left. The next visual, after the second intertitle, is a medium shot of two men looking left at a third, who looks down at a letter. The intervening title reads: 'THE UNCLE TELLS THE RANCH FOREMAN OF THE ORPHANS' ARRIVAL.' Despite the apparent jump in space, Griffith maintains continuity between the visuals, both by the number of people in each shot and by the directional gazes. Yet this second visual would 'read' quite differently without the intertitle. What we see in the shot are two men looking not at the letter, but at the face of the uncle. And yet he holds the letter in front of both of them in

<sup>\*</sup>Kemp R. Niver, *D. W. Griffith's The Battle at Elderbush Gulch* (Los Angeles: Locare Research Group, 1972).

the centre of the frame. Without the intertitle, the visual suggests only that the ranch foreman and the other man cannot read, while the uncle can. In this respect, the visual is somewhat emblematic: that is, unexplained without the intertitle.

Title Five reads: 'THE ONLY BABY IN THE SETTLEMENT.' Already arrived, the young wife (Lillian Gish) holds her baby in the centre of the frame. This title forecasts the eventual separation of the family (the father wounded in the bushes, the baby in the grip of a dead man on the ground and the wife inside the cabin). At the same time, Griffith suggests that impending separation visually, for as husband and wife begin to walk left out of the frame, he swings a suitcase upward, blocking the baby. Title Six reads: 'NO DOGS IN MY HOUSE.' That title is linked with the title about the only baby by the continuity in the visuals. The ranch foreman peeks into a basket containing the 'orphan' pups, just as the old bearded man peeked at Gish's baby. Mae Marsh holds the pups as Gish held her baby. The basket obscures them from full view, just as the suitcase obscured the baby. And the man with the round hat and moustache to the right of Mae Marsh 'duplicates' the round hat and moustache of the husband in the previous scene. All the principals have changed, but the narrative meaning of the visuals and the two titles remains the same, because of the fixed positions and gestures of the people.

Title Seven introduces a new element in the parallel action: 'THE DOG FEAST SUNKA ALAWAN "WAYATAMIN SUNKA E YA E-E YO" ("MAY YOU EAT DOG AND LIVE LONG").' The ridiculous title masks a symbolic correspondence. Even though the Indians are wronged first (the son of the chief is killed), they remain the 'villains' of the film, for dogs and babies have already been equated in the previous visuals. Griffith's title explaining the Indian feast of eating dogs is tantamount to saying that they eat babies! Griffith, nevertheless, uses the title to good advantage. The supposed Indian language scans phonetically for the spectator but without comprehension (thus, alienation), and the translation in brackets is equally perplexing and alienating, because it suggests a taboo for the spectator (eating dogs). Thus, Griffith has inserted a new element in the narrative which redefines something that has come before:

'An example of this skill is his introduction of what appears to be an unrelated situation toward the end of each scene that is actually the beginning of the next. As soon as Griffith has introduced the "unrelated" scene, he cuts back and completes the original action.' (Kemp R. Niver)

Nearing the end of the first reel, Griffith adds to the suspense of the narrative by reversing the order of intertitle and visual to provide closure.

- (1) Title Fourteen: 'THE DEATH OF THE CHIEFTAIN'S SON FANS THE EVER READY SPARK OF HATRED TO REVENGE'
- (2) Visual: Iris on Indians on warpath, the son's body below.
- (3) Visual: Robert Harron teasing Lillian Gish into letting him show off their baby at the settlement.
- (4) Title Fifteen: 'THE PROUD FATHER LEAVES THE BABY IN CHARGE OF FOND ADMIRERS'

Both titles and visuals suggest an apparent contrast in the narrative. The Indian chief mourns his son's death, while the proud



'The Battle at Elderbush Gulch': the ranch foreman looks at Mae Marsh's puppies; Indians on the warpath, with the dead son of the chief stretched out in the foreground; Lillian Gish at the cabin door; the happy ending; 'Gish holds her baby, Mae Marsh holds her pup'

husband wants to show off his son. But the reversal of visual preceding title fifteen allows for a matched coding between the two visuals. The horizontal baby corresponds to the horizontal dead son of the chief. The warrior's horizontally outstretched arm at the right of one frame (No. 2) matches the horizontally outstretched arm of the husband at the right of the other frame (No. 3). And Lillian Gish's right arm raised upward 'answers' the raised arms of the warriors on the opposite side of their respective frames.

There are twenty intertitles in *The Battle at Elderbush Gulch*, fifteen of which occur in

Reel One alone. They seem to develop the basis for the conflict in Reel Two, which, once begun, 'devours' the rest of the narrative and obviates any further intertitles. The suggestion I am making here is that Griffith used his intertitles to 'build' his narrative towards a climax of complete action. Everything is compressed in Reel Two of *Elderbush* through quick narrative vignettes, each of which expresses a 'crisis' situation, all of them linked through the editing, which takes the place of the intertitles. Griffith's aim here seems to be to cut directly upon the action (the parallel editing), but not away from the action (intertitles).

There are two titles which end the total of twenty, both of them uttered by Lillian Gish ('MY BABY!') and both emphasising the verbal component of the intertitle: speech by a character replaces the cryptic 'chapter' headings. The progression, then, seems to be: narrative titles imposed by Griffith upon the material, giving way to approximated 'speech' by a character within the narrative, giving way to total visualisation (alternation between close-ups and long shots to complement the parallel editing of outside/inside the cabin).

That progression should suggest a further ideological difference between Griffith and Eisenstein. Griffith's 'verbal' title ('MY BABY!') emphasises the individual and points to irreconcilable conflict between the settlers and Indians. The principal characters are shown individually and 'taken out of their environment' by extreme close-ups, while the 'villain' Indians are shown in groups and shot individually only to highlight an atrocity. Conversely, Eisenstein 'accuses' his villains through close-ups and underscores the solidarity of the masses through crowd shots. Further, his 'verbal' title ('BROTHERS!') allows for reconciliation between apparent opposites (the sailors on the Potemkin and the Squadron).

Between the two utterances of 'MY BABY!' by Lillian Gish, Griffith connects his shots by way of an extended close-up on Gish, in reaction shot, allowing for visual cues between shots instead of intertitles:

- (1) Gish reacting to the atrocity of the Indians scalping her neighbour
- (2) to Gish, still held in extreme close-up, remembering her baby
- (3) to a two-shot of the orphans reading in their bed
- (4) to a two-shot of the puppies outside

With the second 'utterance' in the last intertitle of the film, Griffith lets the action be self-explanatory. Without the intertitles, he steps up the tempo and shortens the interval between cuts. At one point, inside the cabin, only the legs of a man are visible behind the distraught Lillian Gish. The man holds a gun to her head, apparently ready to fire if the Indians break down the door. The frame remains both memorable and enigmatic (since the man's identity is unknown), until the last shots of the film and Griffith's final irony. Saved by the cavalry, the principals all emerge, centre-frame: Gish holds her baby, Mae Marsh holds her pup. The ranch foreman enters from the left of the frame, still holding his gun, pointing it as though to repeat: 'No dogs in my house.' But the fact that he is the only one still holding a gun suggests that he was the hidden man with the gun pointed at Lillian Gish's head. Without the intertitles, we'll never know for sure.

## Mother

Pudovkin's *Mother* is a film going in two opposite directions, striving as it does towards the ideology of Eisenstein and the technique of Griffith. That dilemma is reflected in Pudovkin's use of intertitles. The film opens on Vlasov, the locksmith, stumbling and drunk. Pudovkin's ensuing title sets up an opposition which has not yet been exposed visually: 'AS IS OFTEN THE CASE: THE MOTHER—DOWNTRODDEN, THE FATHER—A DRUNK.' The following visual introduces first Pashka, the son, an important character throughout the rest of the film, and only then the mother, 'bent over a sink in a dark corner'. Pudovkin's following titles are either representations of verbal speech (Gorbov's interrupted speech, for example); emblematic metaphor suggestions ('THE TRAP!' after the slamming of the heavy factory doors which are locked from the outside); or, more infrequently, ironic narrative assertions ('IN SHIPKA ALL IS PEACEFUL') which are contradicted by the visuals.

But the intertitles are never fully integrated into the visual montage. It is as though Pudovkin's interruptive intertitles are at odds with the 'story' of the visuals. This conflict is never more obvious than in the alternation of intertitle/visual for the courtroom sequence of Pashka's trial:

- (1) Intertitle: THE DAY OF THE TRIAL.
- (2) Visual: The two-headed eagle at the court-house, with an inscription:
- (3) Title: A FAIR, SWIFT AND MERCIFUL TRIAL.
- (4) Visuals: The court-room: the mother, her eyes looking for her son; portrait of the Tsar with sceptre and orb; the judges' table unoccupied; a police-officer at the door; two soldiers, with bayonets, by the empty dock.
- (5) Intertitle: THE JUDGES.
- (6) Visual: The judges enter, high collars propping up their heads: 'majestic representatives' of the state judiciary.
- (7) Intertitle: THE PROSECUTION.
- (8) Visual: The public prosecutor: 'majestic representative' of the state prosecutor.
- (9) Intertitle: THE WITNESSES FOR THE PROSECUTION.
- (10) Visual: A gallery filled with the 'Black Hundreders', the face of the judge and the judge speaking.
- (11) Intertitle: THE DEFENCE.
- (12) Visual: 'A sad, insignificant, submissive figure.'
- (13) Intertitle: THE WITNESSES FOR THE DEFENCE.
- (14) Visual: An empty bench.
- (15) Intertitle: THE DEFENDANTS.
- (16) Visuals: A bayonet, a soldier, a bayonet, a soldier. Pashka and Vesovshchikov. The mother and public stands. The portrait of the Tsar and in the square outside the court-house mounted policemen dispersing the crowd.
- (17) Intertitle: THE COURT PROCEEDINGS.
- (18) Visual: The public prosecutor speaks.
- (19) Intertitle: THIS EVIDENCE.
- (20) Visuals: From the revolvers and ammunition to the mother's face to the sullen face of Pashka. The judge speaks, the state defender jumps up nervously, sits down and bites his moustache. Pashka looks at him. Outside in the square, the police wait.
- (21) Intertitle: THE SENTENCE.\*

The intertitles come too often and without enough interaction with the visuals to be effective. They occupy as much screen-time as those visuals, many of which are made redundant by them. Only two titles have any effective interplay with the visuals. The first is the title-inscription within a visual, to explain the two-headed eagle at the court-house: A FAIR, SWIFT AND MERCIFUL TRIAL. The following visuals contrast the solitary mother with the portrait of the Tsar with sceptre and orb. The double-eagle is also a tsarist symbol. From this visual conflict, we know that the trial will be swift, but not fair and merciful. The second effective title also works by contrast. The title reads: 'THE WITNESSES FOR THE DEFENCE'. The visual that follows shows an empty bench.

Except for those two titles, the rest are neutral designations of the participants, contrasting the 'majestic' judges and prosecutor with the nervous defence lawyer; contrasting the Black Hundreders with the empty bench; contrasting 'the crowd outside with the mounted police. But the intertitles interrupt the visuals so much that they flatten out the whole proceedings and render the trial 'unreal'. Their effect is theatrical, much like the opening of many American silent films in which the title names a character and the ensuing visual shows him in some brief pose or vignette, as though all characters had to be named before any real action could take place. But the proliferation of the intertitles in this sequence from *Mother* is made more obvious by the fact that they come just before Part Six (Pashka in prison and the mother leading others to free him), after which very few titles are used in the film. Like Griffith, Pudovkin 'stuffs' the first two-thirds of the film with intertitles, just before the parallel montage whose close-ups and quick cutting end the film.

*'Mother': the mother visits her son in prison*



## The Battleship Potemkin

While Pudovkin furthered the 'chronicle of events' with his intertitles and the 'drama' with his visuals, Eisenstein found a way to incorporate both in *Potemkin*, made in the same year as *Mother*. 'Outwardly, *Potemkin* is a chronicle of events but it impresses the spectators as a drama. The secret of this effect lies in the plot, which is built up in accordance with the laws of austere composition of tragedy in its traditional five-act form... This age-honoured structure of tragedy is further stressed by the subtitle each act is preceded by.'†

First function of the intertitles: to denote as 'chapter headings' the five acts of the tragedy: I. Men and Maggots; II. Drama on the Quarter-Deck; III. The Dead Man Cries for Vengeance; IV. The Odessa Steps; V. Meeting the Squadron. Further, Eisenstein structures the events within those five acts on the basis of what he calls 'double repetition', which also involves the use of intertitles.

'In "Drama on the Quarter-Deck" a handful of mutinous sailors—part of the battleship's crew—cry "BROTHERS!" to the firing squad. The rifles are lowered. The whole of the crew joins the rebels.

'In "Meeting the Squadron" the mutinous ship—part of the navy—throws the cry "BROTHERS!" to the crews of the admiralty squadron. And the guns trained on the Potemkin are lowered. The whole of the fleet is at one with the Potemkin.'

†Sergei Eisenstein, 'Introduction' in *The Battleship Potemkin* (London, Lorrimer Publishing, 1968). Other quotations in this section are also from the Lorrimer text.

\*V. I. Pudovkin, *Mother* (Classic Film Scripts), (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973).

Eisenstein denoted the division in two of each section with a 'transition' point that is emphasised by a pause, a *caesura*. Two of the most striking transition points in *Potemkin* are effected through the use of intertitles. The first involves the intertitle 'SUDDENLY...' which halts the fraternising and begins the shooting in the Odessa Steps sequence. In the fifth section, the *caesura* comes with the cry of 'BROTHERS!' which breaks the 'dead silence of expectation' and rekindles 'an avalanche of fraternal feelings', restoring the fraternising that had been interrupted by the other intertitle. The visuals are arranged in a similar double-repetition pattern with designated transition points: the motionless rifle muzzles in Part II corresponding to the gaping mouths of guns in Part V, which reverse the massacre of Odessa to fraternising again.

When Eisenstein explained his 'dialectic of reversal' in terms of the Odessa Steps sequence, his intertitle of 'SUDDENLY...' permeated his discussion of angle, rhythm and tempo:

'And then, as the DOWNWARD movement reaches its culmination, the movement is *suddenly* reversed: instead of the headlong rush of the CROWD down the steps we see the SOLITARY figure of a mother carrying her dead son, SLOWLY and SOLEMNLY GOING UP the steps.

MASS. Headlong rush. DOWNWARD. And all of a *sudden*—

A SOLITARY figure. Slow and solemn. GOING UP. But only for a moment. Then again a LEAP IN THE REVERSE DIRECTION. DOWNWARD movement.

Rhythm accelerates. Tempo increases.

The shot of THE RUSHING CROWD is *suddenly* followed by one showing a perambulator hurtling down the steps. This is more than just different tempos. This is a LEAP IN THE METHOD OF REPRESENTATION—from the abstract to the physical. This gives one more aspect of downward movement.'

In this manner, the intertitle that cuts the section in two is also the ordering principle for the dialectic of reversal: suggest a pattern, then *suddenly* show the reverse by a leap in the opposite direction. The intertitle in this case is not just a narrative interruption; it's also the directorial method for the whole section.

Eisenstein runs the gamut of possible uses for the intertitles in *Potemkin*. There are titles of historical quotes (the opening declaration of Lenin that 'revolution means war', for example). There are titles which introduce characters ('THE SAILORS MATYUSHENKO AND VAKULINCHUK'), but far fewer (of this type) than in either Griffith or Pudovkin. There are intertitles for mood or tempo: 'VIGILANT, BUT CLUMSY' and 'INDIGNANTLY...' Eisenstein used the intertitle of the well-placed adjective or adverb better than any other film-maker, always making sure that such titles formed an integral part of his montage, primarily by placing them in the middle of an image-cluster, and not at the beginning or end.

There are intertitles which represent speech, but these are usually short or fragmented (as in 'BROTHERS!'), except when the full sentence produces a crisis in the narrative, as with Dr. Smirnov's arrogant assertion: 'THESE ARE NOT MAGGOTS... THEY ARE THE DEAD LARVAE OF FLIES. THEY CAN BE WASHED OFF WITH VINEGAR.' Furthermore, Eisenstein gives an intonation to the speech of the intertitle in the corresponding visual: 'He speaks peremptorily, cutting the air with his



'Potemkin': 'Brothers!... Who are you firing at?'

forefinger.' His authorial interruptions in the intertitles are similarly short-form or cut up and returned to, except when the full sentence adds irony or contrast to his dialectic, as with the editorial comment on the dead Vakulinchuk: 'AND HE WHO WAS THE FIRST TO TAKE UP THE CRY OF REBELLION WAS THE FIRST TO FALL AT THE HAND OF THE EXECUTIONER...'

But by far the best use of the intertitles, both for 'verbal' representation and for mood and tempo within the montage, is in the Odessa Steps sequence. The massacre 'answers' the cries of lament which have become cries of protest in Part III:

- (1) Visual: Women begin to sing.
- (2) Intertitle: ALL FOR ONE...
- (3) Visual: The whole crowd begins to sing.
- (4) Intertitle: ONE...
- (5) Visual: The dead Vakulinchuk with the lighted candle in his hands.
- (6) Intertitle: FOR ALL...

The sequence is prophetic of all that occurs in the Odessa Steps sequence, for in Eisenstein's dialectic, each act provokes its opposite act. Women begin to sing in the first visual. The fragmented intertitles produce, then, not speech but song, and the song is initiated by the wailing women, women who will be focused upon individually in the massacre. Eisenstein alternates his visuals from the women to the whole crowd to the solitary body of Vakulinchuk to the whole crowd again. What we have here is the same one-to-one title/visual ratio that we saw in the court-room sequence of *Mother*, but here the titles suggest the solidarity created by the visuals moving from the individual to the crowd. The intertitles suggest the crescendo of individual voices becoming a single crowd-cry.

Similarly, the fragmented title of 'SUDDENLY...' in the Odessa Steps sequence creates the same rhythm, although Eisenstein has moved from 'speech' within the narrative to authorial interruption. That abrupt title also sets up the sudden leap in the dialectic of reversal, from complete joy to utter terror, as Eisenstein's script makes clear:

'The legless invalid *joyfully* waves his cap with one hand. A woman draped with a shawl stands beside her small son. On the mast of the battleship the red flag flutters *victoriously*. The woman, draped with a shawl, and her son look *joyfully* at the battleship.

A girl and a boy wave their small hands in *delight*. The crowd, standing on the harbour steps, *tumultuously* hails the insurgent battleship.

SUDDENLY...

A woman with bobbed hair throws back her head in *terror*.

The crowd on the steps *shudders* and begins to run down the steps.'

Eisenstein then repeats twelve times: 'In terror the crowd runs down the steps.' By repeating his shots in quick succession, he elongated the action and dissected it into its minute parts, all the while forestalling the completion of his intertitle, from 'SUDDENLY...' to 'THE COSSACKS...' which, when it comes, comes with the full force of all his paraded and orchestrated imagery. The delayed completion of the intertitle has the effect of a 'slingshot' response, so that the descent of the Cossacks, itself delayed during all the mad scrambling of the people, comes with an added explosion that is not there in the visuals. And throughout the masterful montage that follows, Eisenstein subtly sets up 'correspondences' between objects: the pram with the child corresponds to the sailors under the tarpaulin; the elderly woman's pince-nez corresponds to Dr. Smirnov's pince-nez; and the lions which are made to stand at the Odessa Theatre correspond to the fallen tsarist double-eagle on the Potemkin.

The Odessa Steps sequence, itself, corresponds to the all-out Indian attack in *The Battle at Elderbush Gulch* or the march on the prison in *Mother*. In all three sequences, alternating close-ups and long shots as well as contrast by cutting with shorter and shorter intervals between cuts replaces the interruptive intertitles. But in the case of Griffith and Pudovkin, the two films go mute after such sequences: they become truly *silent* films. In Eisenstein's film, however, the intertitles return in the final section and alternate between prosaic and emotional reportage

('THE SQUADRON CREEPS UP IN THE DARKNESS') to fragmented speech ('GIVE THE SIGNAL: "JOIN US,"' to 'JOIN ...' to '... US!'). And that latter fragmented exchange is what sets up the full force of 'BROTHERS!', just as the fragmented 'ALL FOR ONE/ONE/FOR ALL' exchange in Part III set up the full force of the 'SUDDENLY .../... THE COSSACKS!' intertitles.

Eisenstein never conceived of the intertitles as a burden; instead, he performed 'controlled experiments' with them and saw them as a fertile field for experiment. Rather than seeing them as separate from the visuals, he saw both in terms of his montage. His fragmented titles as links in a montage chain ('SUDDENLY .../... THE COSSACKS!') and his enlargement of a title to express more 'voice' and more emphasis ('BROTHERS!') suggest an essentially cinematic sense of the printed word and of its filmic possibilities as a *visual* rather than as a kind of computerised read-out with neutral data.

### The Cabinet of Dr Caligari

The titles in German Expressionist films focused on individuals, on the Gothic souls of individuals totally withdrawn from the realities of the outer world. The Expressionist film-makers' emphasis on sets and indoor effects derived both from Gothic literature and from the theatre, and expressed itself in what Paul Rotha has called their 'studio constructivism', the building up of landscapes on studio walls. Kracauer aptly expressed the transformation of the real world and all its referents into a highly stylised studio-set world of symbolic objects:

'... The settings amounted to a perfect transformation of material objects into emotional ornaments. With its oblique chimneys on pell-mell roofs, its windows in the form of arrows or kites and its tree-like arabesques that were threats rather than trees, Holstenwall resembled those visions of unheard-of cities which the painter Lionel Feininger evoked through his edgy, crystalline compositions.\*'

He was, of course, writing about *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, and, just as the landscapes came from the stage and the designers' fantasies, so too the dialogue came from books rather than from the 'real' world. The importance of the intertitles in such a film would seem to be minimal, especially when, as Kracauer noted, 'lettering was introduced as an essential element of the settings—appropriately enough, considering the close relationship between lettering and drawing'. Thus, the intertitles stem from books and give way to lettering upon the visual frame instead of cutting away to a title card. The long inserts of the 'Diary' (University of Uppsala, 1726) take over the entire narration, supposedly being told from the point of view of Francis, as past occurrence, and by going to a text even further in the past, a text supposedly being read by Caligari, the inserts 'steal' the narration away from Francis. The long process of reading those inserts, without recourse to the visuals, establishes Francis' madness in his projection of Caligari.

Counterbalancing the inserts of printed text, then, are the words of hallucination: DU MUSST CALIGARI WERDEN (literally, 'You must become Caligari.') In Francis' projection, however, the pronoun switch is significant: 'I must become Caligari,' the words shimmering against the wall, overhead and in the branches of a bramble.

Overloading the intertitles with inserts from a 'diary' or leaving the intertitle altogether to express the hallucination directly upon the image, both would seem an essentially awkward use of the intertitles. Yet one must remember that *Caligari* is really two films, the one that Mayer and Janowitz scripted to reveal the 'tyranny and chaos' of their society and the one that Decla forced upon Robert Wiene, the corrective version with framing stories to give Caligari the last word, making Francis the madman. And, although Wiene's visuals do an admirable job of creating a projected madness with role reversals involving all the major characters, the remaining intertitles underscore Decla's betrayal of the original script.

*Caligari* opens with an intertitle of 'dialogue', the one exchange given to the older madman who listens to Francis' tale: 'EVERYWHERE THERE ARE SPIRITS ... THEY ARE ALL AROUND US ... THEY HAVE DRIVEN ME FROM HEARTH AND HOME, FROM MY WIFE AND CHILDREN.' Except for one brief response from Jane in the asylum and the final intertitle of speech from the corrective Dr. Caligari, the rest of the speech intertitles belong to Francis, either as direct narration or as replies of others from his point of view within the tale he tells. The intertitles of narration give way to dialogue within the narration and involving the narrator. Thus, Francis introduces Alan: 'ALAN, MY FRIEND.' The next intertitle comes from Alan, 'reversing' the narration: 'COME ON, FRANCIS, LET'S GO TO THE FAIR.' Yet the visuals continue the story of Caligari at the Town Hall, trying to get a permit to exhibit his somnambulist, an event not possibly witnessed by Francis and so not narratable in the

intertitles. And, once the major characters have been introduced, Francis' narration is lost in the interiorised atmosphere of the visuals, at which point the intertitles become authorial headings from nobody's point of view: 'AFTER THE FUNERAL' and 'NIGHT' and 'LUNATIC ASYLUM'.

After the latter title, the framing story resumes the narration of Francis, even though he is supposedly mad: 'HAVE YOU A PATIENT HERE NAMED DR CALIGARI?' Then, both the long inserts from the Uppsala Diary and the shimmering words of the hallucination with the pronoun switch from 'you' to 'I' suggest the complete madness of Caligari, not Francis. That Francis could have projected all this (patient unto doctor, making the doctor the patient) is too far-fetched, especially given the diary inserts (verifying a doctor's projection upon another doctor; to be believed, Francis' projection involves both the physical Caligari and the 'Caligari' of the diary, too much of a remove for a 'madman') and the shimmering hallucination (for which Francis is not present). The circus and the asylum make sense only from one point of view: that of Caligari as the 'ringmaster' in both instances.

The visuals of the corrective framing story at the end are certainly inventive enough, for they not only contradict Francis' narration but they also reverse all the roles of his narration. Yet the framing story begs more questions than it answers. Dr Caligari has the only piece of 'sane' dialogue in the film, the end-piece of dialogue: 'AT LAST I UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF HIS MADNESS. HE THINKS I AM THAT MYSTIC CALIGARI. NOW I SEE HOW HE CAN BE BROUGHT BACK TO SANITY AGAIN.'† His one exchange is supposed to contradict all that has come before. Or is it? We are to assume that he now knows (the Caligari story of the diary, without any checking) what we've just found out through the account of Francis. But if Francis is mad, then was his account of

†The Janus print of the film states 'mythical' instead of 'mystic'.

*'The Cabinet of Dr Caligari'*



\*Siegfried Kracauer in *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972).

the story, including the legend, true? Reversing the projection (the straitjacket, cell and other doctors, all repeated) works visually, but not logically. It does not follow that the doctor's instant understanding of an esoteric allusion from 1726 can produce an equally instant cure for Francis. It is for the audience that Francis' insanity is proclaimed, not Caligari's, and for that same audience that Francis' sanity is also insured, presumably thanks to the self-same doctor who has been the madman throughout the entire narration. Alone, that last intertitle is supposed to reverse all the other intertitles of the film, stemming from a supposedly sane Francis.

Even the final visual of the film contradicts the apparent return to order. There is an iris-in on the face of Caligari, blocking out everyone and everything else in the frame, then fade for the end title. Kracauer suggested the codification of the iris-in:

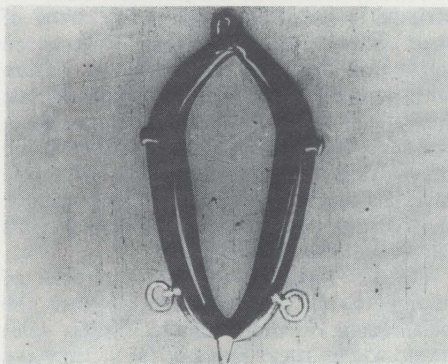
'Significantly, most fair scenes in *Caligari* open with a small iris-in exhibiting the organ-grinder whose arm constantly rotates and, behind him, the top of a merry-go-round which never ceases its circular movement. The circle here becomes a symbol of chaos. While freedom resembles a river, chaos resembles a whirlpool. Forgetful of self, one may plunge into chaos; one cannot move on in it.'

The final iris-in enjoins the supposedly corrected Caligari with the Caligari of the fair, enjoining as well the asylum with the merry-go-round of chaos. *Caligari*, despite all its corrections, is *still* the film it was originally intended to be.

### Fernand Léger and Man Ray

French film-makers of the period were also trying to convey the inner states of characters, but states that would assault or attack the 'bourgeois' morality of the audience. Whether 'avant-garde' or surrealist, these film-makers had an aversion to using intertitles in the most traditional way, as representations of speech. So they used them as mechanical configurations, as something plastic to be shaped and played with, as in Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*; or they used them as a parody of literature or as found metaphors, as in Man Ray's *Les Mystères du Château de Dés*; or as a logical absurdity, a parody of the use of intertitles altogether, as in Buñuel's *Chien Andalou*.

*Ballet Mécanique* has very few intertitles, appropriately so for the 'first film without a scenario'. But those few titles allow for a full amplification of the pattern established in the visuals. The first visual and intertitle of the film are both homages to Chaplin: the visual of the stick man in Chaplin's bowler hat and with his famous cane, disconnected everywhere, yet forming a coherent comedian in cubist form; the intertitle explaining the tribute behind the film: 'CHARLOT PRESENTE LE BALLET MECANIQUE.' The next and only other intertitle in the film reads: 'ON A VOLÉ UN COLLIER DE PERLES DE 5 MILLION.' The literal meaning of the title, the stealing of a pearl necklace, makes little sense in terms of the rest of the film and is never meant to make sense in a literal way. The title functions as pure graphics, to be manipulated in its



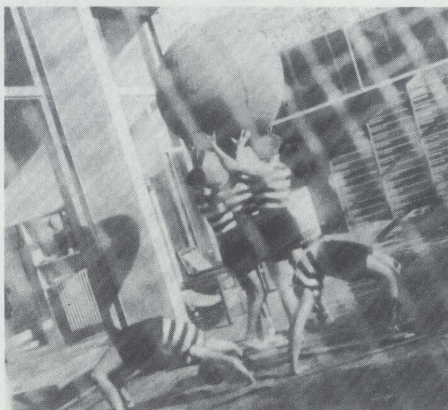
'Ballet Mécanique': the title and the shot of a horse collar

various parts; it becomes concrete poetry through the camerawork.

It is first fragmented into 'ON A VOLE' with repeated zooms and repetitions of the zero figure to connote the 'MILLION' of the title. The camera continues to move in and then out on the letters, each time emphasising the proliferation of 0's. Then Léger cuts away to a repeated shot of eyes in boxes and a shot of a horse harness in the shape of a twisted '0': a metaphor for the 'COLLIER' or necklace. The whole title is then inverted, seen upside down, with, of course, only the 0's retaining their original position and significance. Finally, the 0 emerges and comes at the camera, replacing the rest of the intertitle. Thus, Léger constructs an entire sequence around the intertitle, suggesting the theft, the necklace, the pearls and the worth of the necklace in money terms, all through the fragmentation of the title and the camerawork.

*Les Mystères du Château de Dés*, less ambitious than Léger's film in terms of concrete poetry or cubist configurations, is more advanced both as a parody of intertitles and as an extension of those intertitles to create a Surrealist metaphor. At the beginning of the film, Man Ray ironically

'Les Mystères du Château de Dés'



suggests the influence of Mallarmé. A beginning intertitle reads: 'UN COUP DE DE N'ABOLIRA JAMAIS LE HASARD' ('a throw of the dice will never abolish chance'). But Man Ray follows the title with a visual of over-large dice being rolled by a mechanical hand in close-up. The mechanical hand alters the meaning of the Mallarmé line, creating a construct out of juxtaposed opposites, similar to the construct of Duchamp's 'canned chance'. On a roll of the dice, two men leave in a car. The following intertitle: 'LES PORTES DE PARIS S'OUVRENT SUR L'INCONNU' and then: 'A TOUTE VITESSE PAR MONTS ET PAR VAUX A TRAVERS LA FRANCE' ('at full speed by leaps and bounds across France'). Man Ray's irony in these intertitles is in the 'point of view' of the 'unknown' in the first intertitle: that of the camera mounted on the dashboard of the car, 'creating' all the leaps and bounds of the second intertitle.

Man Ray juxtaposed highly literary/poetic titles with cryptic insert titles that create metaphors out of what is already in the visuals. Title: 'ETOILE DE JOUR'. Visual: a chandelier in the form of a 'star' as seen through the window of the castle. The camera moves through the castle, cutting away only for the intertitle 'L'INTRUS' ('the intruder') and the subsequently repeated intertitles of 'PERSONNE' ('nobody'). The irony here, of course, is that the camera is the intruder. It is in the swimming-pool sequence, however, that Man Ray uses his intertitles most imaginatively. Title: 'LA FEMME ... LA JONGLEUSE'. Visual: a woman juggling balls under the water! Title: 'PISCINEMA' (a made-up word, from *piscine* [swimming pool] and cinema). Visual: a reverse dive, the woman coming out of the water and back on to the diving board.

Man Ray's entire film juxtaposes Lautréamont's sewing machine and umbrella upon a dissection table through the merging of playful images with suggestive intertitles. Title: 'MINERVE CASQUEE'. Visual: a woman in a fencing mask with tubes extending from her head. In a sense, his intertitles 'justify' all the experimentation in the images.

### Un Chien Andalou

Buñuel's intertitles in *Un Chien Andalou* are neither graphically dynamic like Léger's nor interesting metaphor-makers like Man Ray's. And yet they form the most coherent and unified use of the intertitles in any French film of the silent era. When Jean Vigo praised the film's 'admirable confrontation between the subconscious and the rational',\* he was suggesting an interesting relationship between the images and the intertitles in silent films. If film images, all film images, are potential 'dream' images—that is, not necessarily defined by logic or causality—then the function of the intertitles in many silent films was to 'ground' or 'weigh down' the images, to give them logic, causality and a literalness that would seem antithetical to the dream state.

Buñuel and Dali wisely chose *not* to ground their images with the intertitles. In fact, at

\*Jean Vigo in Luis Buñuel, *L'Age d'Or and Un Chien Andalou* (Classic Film Scripts). (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968).

first glance, the titles would seem to add absolutely nothing to the comprehension of the visuals. On one level, this is true. Buñuel parodied the use of titles in silent films with his intertitles in *Un Chien Andalou*, all having to do with time, all logically absurd. But upon close inspection, each of those titles serves structurally as a 'break' point, somewhat like Eisenstein's *caesurae*. Each 'suspends' the fascination of the imagery, calling attention to the process of viewing itself, before triggering some new incongruity in the images.

The first intertitle reads 'ONCE UPON A TIME'. The title suggests the formula beginning of a fairy tale, something 'surreal' or 'irreal', to use John Barth's term via Borges. Yet that title separates the 'framing' sequence of Buñuel himself cutting the eye of the woman, a sequence which is partially explained in the script, if not in the film, in the final image of the film. One addition in the final script, not in the original script, was the notation: 'on the left arm, a man's wristwatch.\*' That addition enriches the film by serving as an added metaphor in the framing sequence: wristwatch intersects with sharpened razor/cigarette in mouth intersects mouth/clouds 'cut' through the moon/razor cuts the eye. The wristwatch also corresponds to the man wearing a wristwatch in the film's final sequence, when he points to his watch as if to say that the woman is late for their rendezvous.

The cutting of the eye ends the sequence and the second intertitle reads: 'EIGHT YEARS LATER'. The title seems to provide discontinuity rather than a smooth transition between sequences. Eight years later than what? Why eight? The woman reappears in the second sequence, both eyes intact; the man of the opening sequence disappears from the film. But his 'legacy' is the striped box worn by the young man on the bicycle. The stripes match the shirt and tie worn by the man with the razor, a shirt and tie he wears only for the actual cutting of the eye: 'We can make out the man's striped shirt, as well as the striped tie he now wears.' But even though the two sequences are matched visually with the stripes, there is a time discontinuity created through the intertitle. The title suggests a passage of time from the first sequence, but the first man disappears altogether, to be replaced by a younger man on a bicycle, while the woman stays the same age and with no visible injury to her face.

The next intertitle is preceded by another 'break' in the narrative, this time a spatial incongruity. The young man whose hand is still caught in the door is now simultaneously on the other side of the door and in the bed smiling at the woman. And the woman maintains the same posture as before, but from the other side of the door.

'Close-up of the young woman, now inside the room, yet in the same position as she was on the other side of the door. She looks around and lets go of the door.'

The new spatial incongruity triggers the intertitle 'TOWARDS THREE IN THE MORNING,'† which signals the entrance of the new male character. Significantly, during this next

sequence between the two men, the woman is absent for the first time in the film. The young man faces the wall, the 'older' man steps back and is about to turn toward the camera when the next intertitle intervenes. That title clearly blocks our vision of his face, so that when we do see his face, we are forced to realise another time incongruity. In the original shooting script the man turns to the camera *before* the title and the identities of the two men are much more closely interrelated.

'The stranger has done all this with his back to the camera. Only now does he turn around for the first time to go and fetch something in another part of the room. At that instant, the shot goes out of focus. The stranger moves in slow motion and we see that his features are identical to those of the first man. They are the same person, except that the stranger is younger, more full of pathos, rather like the man must have been many years earlier.'

In the final version of the script, the 'stranger' remains the stranger, and his face is not visible until after the intertitle: 'SIXTEEN YEARS BEFORE.' The title itself seems to be some kind of geometric progression in reverse, an 'answer' to the title 'EIGHT YEARS LATER.' In fact, if the title can be believed, the ensuing action takes place eight years prior to



'Un Chien Andalou': from striped shirt to striped box

the opening sequence of the film. But that time logic is inconsequential to the effect of the intertitle upon the visuals, for only the 'stranger' gets sixteen years younger. Our 'young man' of before stays at his same age, which explains his ability to transform the school books into revolvers and do battle with the other man, who has changed from a 'father figure' to an equal. When shot, the stranger falls, not to the carpet, but to the ground in a field, scratching the back of a semi-naked woman, who disappears after he has fallen. Thus, the time incongruity engenders a spatial incongruity, along with the inexplicable appearance and disappearance of the semi-naked woman. And

†In the original script, the title read 'AT THREE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING'. The corrected final version is more imprecise and more in keeping with the first title ('ONCE UPON A TIME'), thus leaving a more direct correspondence between the two precise titles: 'EIGHT YEARS LATER' and 'SIXTEEN YEARS BEFORE'.

yet that woman foreshadows the return of the earlier woman when Buñuel cuts from the field back to the room again.

The signal for the final confrontation between the woman and the young man is the extreme close-up of the death's head moth, symbol of both death and life/metamorphosis. He claps his hand to his mouth and, when he takes it away, his mouth has disappeared. Her 'answer' is to put on lipstick. Hairs grow on the man's face where the mouth used to be. The young woman quickly looks at her armpit, which is hairless. The metaphor is completed in the film because Buñuel had cut earlier to a quick insert of a sea urchin (a visual equivalent of armpit). Curiously, the sea urchin is never mentioned in either version of the script. Yet the insert is crucial, for it suggests the beach of the film's final sequence. Thus, it not only completes the metaphor of mouth-hair/armpit, but it also provides continuity between the room and the beach, in the same way that the breeze blowing in the woman's hair as she slams the door also prefigures the beach. Her leaving the room would seem to be the place for another intertitle, but Buñuel offers none, allowing the two sequences to collide and, in so doing, delaying the effect of the final intertitle: 'IN THE SPRING.' That title, of course, is ironic, in that the birth which is supposed to accompany the season is nowhere present here. Instead, the woman and yet another man are shown in a fixed pose, buried in the sand. The 'happy ending' is negated by Buñuel. His script is much more explicit than the end-visual of the film:

'Everything has changed. We now see a limitless desert; the man and the young woman are in the centre of the screen, buried up to their chests in sand, blinded, in rags, being eaten alive by the sun and by swarms of insects.'

The script suggests both blindness (relating to the cutting of the eye in the opening sequence) and being eaten alive by swarms of insects (relating to the ants crawling out of the young man's hand). But the spectator can read neither 'blindness' nor the insects in that shadowy last visual.

Buñuel's intertitles, then, while parodying the traditional use of intertitles as an approximation of speech or as an explicator of the narrative, do propel the narrative by following some kind of incongruity in the preceding visuals and by triggering another kind of incongruity in the following visuals.

The examples of Buñuel, Man Ray, Léger, Wiene/Mayer, Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Griffith all suggest the endlessly diverse ways in which the intertitles in silent films could be used, in both aesthetic and ideological terms. It would be fallacious, then, to assume that all that was lost in the passage from silent to sound films was the awkward time of the title cards as interruptive inserts in the narrative. If that were true, then there would not have been much change in the established typage and montage of silent films. But sound necessitated a wholesale shift in the ways film-makers dealt with the use of the camera and with their sense of editing. Clearly, the 'verbal' function of the titles was only one among many. With all the sophisticated technology at the disposal of today's film-makers, there is still a great deal to be learned from the Babel of those 'silent' intertitles.

\*This notation comes from the final script. There is no mention of the shirt and tie in the original script. Thus, Buñuel's final script provides a great deal of film continuity to what was supposedly the disjointed free play of the creators' imaginations.

# INDEPENDENT FRAME

**Independent Frame:  
a studio-based,  
pre-planned,  
pre-packaged, pre-fabricated**

**method of film production  
which maximised the  
use of process  
work and minimised  
the amount of  
setting.**

## Julian Poole

In the immediate post-war period the J. Arthur Rank Organisation was trying, unsuccessfully, to bulldoze its way into the American market by means of its costly prestige film productions. At the same time Rank's Production Film Facilities, irreverently known to some as 'Piffle', were experimenting with a system of making films which would not only reduce the costs but also increase the speed of film production. That system was Independent Frame.

The system had first been proposed to Rank in 1945 by David Rawnsley, who in 1946 was made director of Rank's Central Research Organisation. The first stage of the Independent Frame experiment spans from 1945 to late in 1947, with the completion of the first film to be made with the system, *Under the Frozen Falls* (G.B. Instructional, produced by Donald Wilson, directed by Darrel Catling). The second stage was the setting up of the Aquila production company, one of the many Rank independents, under Donald Wilson, with the explicit purpose of testing I.F.; the fourth—and last—feature to be made by this company was released in July 1949. The third stage was to be the application of television principles to aid filming; but because of Rank's overall financial losses in 1949 this stage was never properly researched.

The aims of the Independent Frame experiment seem, even at this date, to be commendable. As well as reducing costs and increasing the speed of production, by improving studio practice and work patterns, it was hoped to increase continuity of performances for actors; and a continuous production programme would provide permanent employment for technicians and craft labour. An exclusive announcement in *The Cinema* (1 January 1948) pointed out that the I.F. process, which until then had been surrounded by great secrecy, was merely the development of already known processes and the application of common sense. It co-ordinated many ideas which had been found valuable in the past. David Rawnsley saw I.F. as a plea for better equipment, better studios, greater technical efficiency—in other words, better facilities and working conditions for making pictures.

A clue to Rawnsley's thinking can be found in an article in the *Penguin Film Review*

(No. 9, May 1949), in which he talked to Oswald Blakeston about some of his ideas for the simplification of film design and presentation. An audience, Rawnsley implies, should be made to work for its pleasure: 'A film which does not attempt to exploit the imagination is a film made in the most expensive way. The spoon-feeding conventions of film land are the inflationary elements in so many pictures' budgets.' By 'spoon-feeding' Rawnsley means the very literalness of linking sequences. Taxi arrives outside house, star gets out, pays fare, goes up steps, knocks on door, door opened by maid who leads star along corridor, through door and into room where lover is waiting. All this needs a street set, someone to play the taxi driver, someone the maid, a large interior corridor set.

Such sequences, Rawnsley says, can rob a picture of its vitality, and are often the most expensive to shoot: 'Yet all this elaboration, which simply holds up the story, could be

inferred from a design of sound. We could see the lover waiting for his mistress and hear the sound of a car, the ringing down of a taximeter and the slamming of its door; and this inference could eliminate an orgy of set building... It would seem, then, that the businessmen and the aesthetes should be allies in fighting the sustained contempt of directors for their audience... Was there ever a child who stopped the tale of the Three Bears to inquire about the colour of the wallpaper or the "production-value" of the ceiling?

The essence of I.F. lay in pre-planning and pre-fabrication. As a system of production economy it was studio-based. It called for extremely detailed planning and preparation of all elements of production before shooting actually began; and it was this that earned it its strait-jacket reputation.

Feature film production was to be contiguous, and within the production process there were to be five distinct phases.

### 1. Preparation, treatment and script (4-6 weeks)

A treatment was to be worked out in as much detail as thought necessary by the writer and director, bearing in mind that the I.F. system attempted to provide as much continuity of performance for the actors as possible. The only limitations were to be budgetary. The writer, director, designer, sound and music directors and editor then prepared the shooting script, the producer acting as arbiter if necessary. Each scene was to be analysed, all requirements stated and considered, other key technicians called in for consultation if required. The director described the action, the designer showed rough settings, the editor the smoothest cutting angles, the sound and music director the appropriate effects, the writer the characterisation and dialogue. The

resulting script then became a visually tabulated document based on actual locations. Locations had been previewed and any action based on them, the designer being present throughout discussions. Although not essential, an un-animated cartoon or story reel, composed of the script sketches together with commentary and key dialogue, was envisaged.

The previewing of locations is an important link between this phase and the next, since once continuity had been agreed by the script team the locations were visited again. On this second visit every key set-up was covered by photographic stills. Measurements were taken of the relationship of the proposed studio set-up to any pertinent feature of landscape or buildings. Exposures, shooting angles and so on were all noted, since it was these stills, or plates, which in many cases were to form the studio set.

## 2. Preparation of the Frame (2-9 months)

Everything which could be prepared before the film went into final shooting was to be done away from the studio space and without involving the principal actors. This included, for example, complete preparation of all still and motion picture plates, action scenes shot on location with doubles standing in for the actors, drawings for set construction, and assembly of wardrobe and special props. Studio-constructed settings were to be kept to a minimum, the usual setting consisting of one or two back projection screens with constructed sets prefabricated on floats, which could then be wheeled into position to tie in with the B.P. plates. For example, there would be no need to build a whole staircase if only the bottom steps were to be used. A still or B.P. plate would be made of a suitable staircase, the bottom steps constructed on the movable float or rostrum and then wheeled into place. In this way not only was there a saving in the use of materials, but also in the time that the studio floor was occupied for building and dismantling the set.

Precise recording of information on both the still and motion picture plates gave the cameraman every facility in the final studio shooting. For these plates to be presented accurately, and for effective use to be made of floor equipment, it was essential for the photographer to work closely with the Art Department. Screen size, picture frame, camera height, tilt and cant, the distance and scale of objects and lines of interlock had all to be noted. Rawnsley saw the photographer and the cameraman as the same person and wanted to establish a special category for this type of work—a production photographer. Having the actual studio cameraman out on location would, he felt, give a proper emphasis to standards. Casting of characters appearing in location sequences also had to be done at this stage, since only doubles were to be used on location—another saving, this time in expensive hotel bills and lengthening contracts caused by actors having to sit around because of bad weather. (This complete prefabrication of the Frame gave the possibility of crating the Frame abroad for a different language version of the film, given that the foreign language casting would have to match the doubles used on the location sequences.)

All settings were to be constructed off the studio floor and assembled ready for use in a completely insulated Assembly Bay adjacent to the shooting floor. Settings could thus be assembled while shooting on the floor was in progress. The Assembly Bay was to be large enough to contain racks for storing set pieces, a property room and finishing shops for touching up the settings after final assembly. A set could then go on to the stage fully dressed and complete in every detail.

Lengthy pre-planning would mean there was no need for variation or discussion on the

'Floodtide': Sailing sequence. How many boats?



Establishing shot of loch and yacht. Cut to



Studio construction, yacht from establishing shot still visible; shadows on the water do not match those on boat. A horizontal line is again used to mask the screen.

studio floor. The studio was to have a twin stage so that two set-ups could be prepared simultaneously, thus avoiding one of the greatest time-users—interlocking and lighting. While an advance unit roughed in the set ahead of the shooting unit, final rehearsals would be taking place on the shooting set-up, enabling a speedy change-over to be made. With a talk-back system and earphones there would be no disturbance on the floor; and the studio floor was to be gridded, like a map, so that everything could be exactly pinpointed. Everything on the floor was to be as mobile as possible—spot rails, screen holders, projection towers and self-powered floats.

## 3. Rehearsals for Actors and Technicians (3-4 weeks)

Once the preparation was complete, the rehearsals could start. The last week of rehearsals would be on one of the twin stages, where every aspect of production could

be tried out and adjusted under actual production conditions. Any mind-changing had to take place at this stage.

## 4. Shooting (4 weeks average)

The shooting schedule would be shorter, allowing actors to appear in more films a year than with the conventional method of filming. There should be less hanging around on set. On the experimental film *Under the Frozen Falls*, which contained 80 per cent process work, shooting time was reduced by a third and there was a 90 per cent reduction in electricity consumption and a saving of 70 per cent in materials.

## 5. Post-production

This stage would be as normal but reduced in duration by virtual pre-editing. When the shooting was complete, the film would leave the floor immediately. The space would then be available for another production which, by this time, would have passed through phases 1 and 2, so that shooting could begin immediately.

The I.F. system supposed the preparation of several Frames at once, since otherwise there would be little gained from the time-saving devices. It was hoped to achieve a shooting rate of from 25 to 35 films per year per production stage. One producer could competently handle three films at a time, preparing at the rate of one film in nine months and shooting at the rate of one film in six weeks. Output could be stepped up and the members of a unit kept together. The system also supposed a refined degree of technical skill: everyone on the unit had to obey the I.F. rules, and that included the trade unions. In one sense, I.F. went against union policy because it did not respect demarcation; each technician, it was hoped, would understand the next man's problem and assist in clearing it. For both the initial experimental film and the Aquila productions, an agreement was reached with the unions which allowed immediate decisions to be made on the studio floor should any hitch occur.

## Technical Implications

The largest single factor affecting I.F. as far as equipment was concerned was the projection unit, which necessitated the use of long projector tunnels in order to fill screens of up to thirty feet across. The problem with the screens was to obtain overall illumination and to avoid high spots of light at the centre. Huge cannon-like projectors were developed, powered by 300 amp arcs—small searchlights almost. Short focus lenses were eventually developed, enabling the distance between projector and screen to be cut. Sixteen and thirty feet high projector towers were constructed, which had to be easily manoeuvrable and also steady to avoid judder of the projected image. The height was necessary not just for fitting the image on to the screen but for aligning the image along

Frame stills taken from *'Floodtide'* to illustrate aspects of Process Photography in Independent Frame



Constructed set and B.P. screen. The train has moved across screen left to right. The horizontal bar is probably part set and part projection. Note edges of screen masked by set construction. ▲



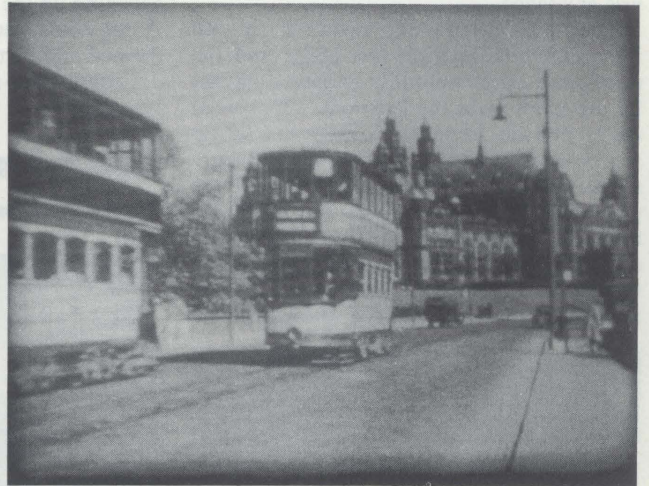
As if to compensate for the flattening effect of I.F., this location scene, with unidentifiable doubles, stresses the three-dimensional perspective; a classic example of the use of converging lines to create perceptual space. ▲



Find the join. The floor tiles in the studio match those on the plate, the cabinet centre screen is plate, that between the attendant and the young man is studio. ▲

Tram Sequence from *'Floodtide'*

Composition of a typical sequence: actuality—studio—actuality, with use of doubles



Here again the frame uses a common vanishing point to create an illusion of space. The tram, centre, is moving diagonally to the left; that on the left to the right. ▲



Dissolve from actuality to studio with use of B.P., or Moving Matte. Note the shadowed emphasis given to tram ceiling, almost like a proscenium arch in front of the screen or matte space. At the end of this shot, the two men get up and move off frame upper right ▲



Tram moves right to left, stops, passengers and doubles descend. Doubles identifiable by cases and packages. ▲

the axis of the movie camera. Most of this new equipment was supplied by Armstrong Vickers, to the specifications of Rawnley's design team. It was not unusual for Rank's Technical Directors department to be brought in to solve some of the technical problems.

Lighting techniques had also to be developed, and it became possible to light a set more quickly than normal and with a third of the usual number of lamps, with consequent savings in the electricity bill. This was achieved by the use of indirect lighting—reflectors of light balloon fabric stretched on a light alloy frame were clamped on the heads of floats and stands in the vicinity of the setting and used to redirect the light from the lamps. If there was to be continuous shooting, however, lighting became a problem. Every camera angle had then to be lit at the same time, with the lighting consequently losing all dramatic potential. Shadows were also a problem. Actors on stage had to be lit to match in with the back projection, which in several instances meant the positioning of lights so that when a character moved out of shot he threw a shadow across the back projection screen.

The seeming reliance on back projection and process photography seems to have caused antipathy towards Independent Frame. The system appears to have been caught in its own technology: on the one hand, authenticity should be gained by having plates of actual backgrounds as opposed to studio sets, yet the very use of process work placed certain limitations on the authenticity of movement. An actor could not move from close-up into long shot without going behind a convenient prop to allow his double to take over.

Independent Frame was trying to lay the bogey of process work for the British film industry; to take it out of the Special Effects department and make it no more than an ordinary tool of production. There may well have been a false impression that process projection represented a major part of I.F., but it is in this area that the industry as a whole benefited. When I.F. was first proposed, the equipment available for still process projection and motion picture projection was of an extremely low standard. This equipment was improved. Attention was also given to the moving matte system, to improved optical work, transparencies, screens and many other essential tools of production. Would this have happened without I.F.? There is no way of knowing, but certainly within the Rank organisation I.F. brought these deficiencies to the fore. Perhaps there is even a link between Pinewood Studio's currently much sought after expertise and the interest generated by Independent Frame.

## The Aquila Experiment

The Aquila production package, initially for three films to test I.F. as a system, was begun in January 1948. Shooting started on the first feature on 20 September 1948. The project was expanded to four films because the preparation of a fourth subject could continue simultaneously with the completion of the first three films, using the same

technical crew. This fourth film was completed by 13 April 1949.

All the films were produced by Donald Wilson, who also directed the first, *Warning to Wantons*, released in February 1949. According to the publicity handout, it concerns 'Renee de Vaillant... a model pupil at her convent school, yet underneath her short frock beats the frivolous heart of a minx. She wrings proposals from a rich Ruritanian Count and then goes off to marry a peasant who picks up his gay little nymph and carries her off to the woods.'

*Floodtide*, directed by Frederick Wilson, is almost an early version of *Room at the Top*, complete with tipsy other woman but minus pregnancy and suicide. A young man from a remote area of Scotland goes to work in a Clydebank shipyard. He becomes the yard's chief designer, saves a ship from being broken on the floodtide, and marries the boss's daughter. There is an echo here, perhaps, of David Rawnley himself, the art director designer trying to save Rank... The film was released in March 1949.

*Stop Press Girl*, directed by Michael Barry, is also about a young person from the country; this time a young girl who has unconsciously inherited a peculiar power—she stops machinery after fifteen minutes. 'A gay "stop go" comedy', it was ready to be released in March 1949 but was evidently so

have been tested on three bad pictures of which *Stop Press Girl* is indubitably the worst? Because its plot is so clumsy the back projection sequences are at once apparent.'

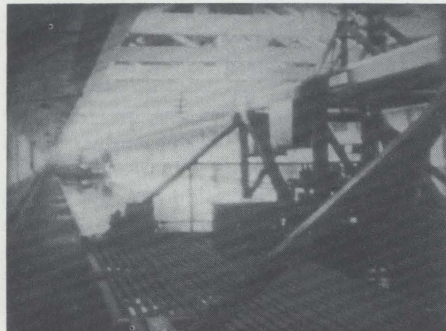
The fourth film, *Poet's Pub* (from the Eric Linklater novel), was also directed by Frederick Wilson. It was released in July 1949. It was 'poorly directed', said the *Observer*: 'There is a general air of cramped restraint. The entire cast seems to be suffering from claustrophobia with arthritic complications.' A few later films are known to have benefited directly from I.F.: *Boys in Brown* (1949, directed by Montgomery Tully), *So Long at the Fair* (1950, directed by Anthony Darnborough and Terence Fisher) and *Prelude to Fame* (1950, directed by Fergus McDonnell).

The I.F. system was widely publicised, and the Aquila productions attracted more critical attention than might normally have been given to such films. The reviews were generally hostile, and it is unfortunate that the experiment should have been judged on films which were evidently poorly served by story and talent. Success depended on more than a financial commitment on Rank's part. Or perhaps, having been persuaded to back I.F. at a time when he wanted to keep ahead of new developments in film-making, Rank then changed his allegiance to those who opposed the system. Independent Frame certainly aroused controversy and antagonism. Everything, said its opponents, was to be sacrificed to the function of design, allowing little or no room for improvisation. Donald Wilson excused Rank in a paper he read to a meeting of the British Kinematograph Society and the Association of Cinema and Allied Technicians on 23 March 1949. 'It would,' he said, 'have been foolhardy to have launched into high budget pictures with valuable stars at this early stage.' It might have shown commitment, though. Could anyone have made a success of such material?

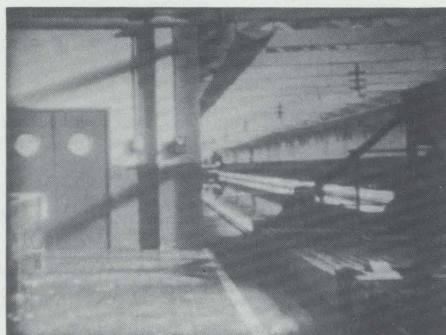
Only one stage at Pinewood was made over to Aquila, when Rawnley's scheme was geared to two. A one-week acting and one-week technical rehearsal were to be adhered to, together with a shooting schedule of six to seven weeks on the studio floor. The married print was to be delivered within eight to nine weeks after shooting was completed. No stars were used, only available feature actors, with doubles used on location. But if one looks at *Floodtide*, for instance, it is difficult to decide whether the limitations are those inherent in the system or in the personnel involved.

That the amount of actual work going on in the film's shipyard setting is confined to a little genteel riveting is a limitation which can hardly be blamed on I.F. But the film does highlight certain drawbacks in the system. Movement in the studio is lateral, across the screen left to right, right to left, and usually front of frame; the build-up of a sequence tends to become repetitive. But the seeming rigidity of moving from location long shot with doubles, to studio medium shot with the actors and back projection, and back again to location long shot, may again be a limitation not so much of the system as of its users. As if to compensate for the flatness of the lateral movement, many of the location shots emphasise the three-dimensional nature of perspective—with the classic use of converging lines to create perceptual space. Several location sequences also emphasise diagonal movement, that is from back left of

'Floodtide': Testing tank sequence. Again the use of a diagonal vanishing point. The raft has moved back left to front right.



Cut to



There might be two B.P. screens in use, one for tank information, the other for the wall with the switches. The door is set construction. The use of shadows hides the join between 'raft' set and 'raft' plate.

appalling that it was never distributed. 'It is so bad it brings criticism to a dead stop,' said the *Daily Telegraph*. But the *Sunday Chronicle* raised the most pertinent points: 'Is it not... unfair that David Rawnley's Independent Frame system should so far

frame to front right, before dissolving or cutting to studio. There is obviously here a conscious attempt to create the illusion of space, giving the visual element of the film an almost architectural quality.

The prefabricated set construction used in the studio was very much concerned with masking the back projection screens. There soon evolved obvious ways of doing this by means of beams or seating. A sailing sequence in *Prelude to Fame*—not an Aquila film but shot with mainly the same technical crew—mirrors one in *Floodtide*, with an establishing location shot of a yacht cutting to a studio set with a boom masking the back projection screen. *Prelude to Fame* takes the experiment a stage further with an attempt to marry lateral movement of the studio actor with diagonal movement of the location actor on back projection within the same shot. The orchestral sequences in this film, which did much to win it some critical acclaim, probably owe much to the approach required by the I.F. system and its pre-planning.

Evidence of the idea of having a library of back projection plates can also be seen in *Prelude to Fame* and *So Long at the Fair*, where the same motionless, peopleless plate of the Eiffel tower and its gardens is used. Otherwise *So Long at the Fair* seems visually to owe little to I.F., apart from its use of location doubles. Its main set, a hotel, is ornate and three-dimensional, with the space fully used by the actors.

### I.F. stage three

An integral part of Rawnsley's system was the eventual use of television principles to aid the filming of live action performance in continuity, thus combining the scope of film with the spontaneity of theatre. Evidently Rawnsley had been inspired by a visit to Alexandra Palace, then the home of BBC Television. He was intrigued by the possibilities of using a television camera in film-making: the director would be able to see, at the moment of shooting and without having to wait for the rushes, exactly what appeared on the screen. A high definition TV camera would be substituted for the standard film camera on the studio floor, the image conveyed electronically and instantaneously to a control and recording room where it would be recorded under ideal circumstances. The cameras were to have a standard of definition high enough to produce pictures of the same quality as was then provided by a film camera. They would have the same facilities as the film camera and in addition an electronic viewfinder.

Rawnsley's list of requirements reads very much like the equipment to be found in any large television drama studio today: telecine facilities, moving matte for the electronic superimposition of live action on pre-recorded film, live action on live action or film on film. The director's control booth was to be slung up off the studio floor with vision and sound mixing controls. In this, Rawnsley was before his time: recording of television programmes was still being done by placing a motion picture camera in front of a TV monitor. Video was yet to come. BBC Television technicians were to be found visiting Pinewood to study the I.F.

equipment. Donald Wilson, the Aquila producer, went to BBC Television after being involved with Group Three. And Rank himself tried to get into the TV film market, but only managed to sell the BBC his Shepherd's Bush studios. It is interesting to note that one of the problems of the British film industry to which Rawnsley saw I.F. as providing a solution was 'the failure of those who could be influential in both Films and Television to appreciate the benefits which could be derived from co-operation between them where the unification of production methods and the exploitation of common markets could assist in solving the present crisis' (*Cine Technician*, March/April 1948).

The Rank Organisation's commercial difficulties in 1949 meant the withdrawal of financial support for research. I.F.'s third stage was never reached. Of the equipment being developed the first prototype would not have been ready until 1950; production models not for a further two years.

### Why did I.F. fail?

Independent Frame was both of its time and yet not of it—the reasons connected with its failure are not all connected with the system itself. In the immediate post-war years, when I.F. was still Rawnsley's dream, studio space was at a premium; studios had been requisitioned by the government and had not yet been returned to the industry, and some were bomb damaged. But when the time came for the dream to become a reality, there was studio space to spare. What was the point of one I.F. stage doing the work of five stages operating under the conventional system when no one was using the other stages? There had never been as much empty space in the studios as there was at the end of 1948. The entire staff of the Teddington studios had been laid off because Warner Bros. could no longer afford to keep the studios at the ready. At least 200 personnel were expected to be stood down by Rank at the Islington studios; and when Rank sold Shepherd's Bush to the BBC in November 1949, Highbury, Islington and British National Twickenham studios had already been closed. In December 1948, 7,739 studio staff were employed in the British film industry; a year later, that figure had dropped to 4,431.

The savings in production costs inherent in the I.F. system were out of key with the general mood of Rank productions, where most major talent was involved in the making of expensive prestige films. But I.F., if not of its studio, was of its time. A working party under Sir George Gater, set up in February 1949, had as its specific brief the examination of ways of reducing film production costs. Gater was to point out that 'the most serious deficiency in the industry' was the inadequacy of its planning methods. One member of the working party went on to state that 'the industry as a whole cannot prosper without a well co-ordinated production plan.' This was a notion central to I.F.

Possibly because of personalities, the system did not have full support from within the Rank organisation, which may explain why such dreadful material was foisted on to Aquila. If, on the other hand, Aquila chose its own material, then the Rank management

was at fault in putting the experiment in the hands of this group. To misdirect Rank's statement to his Board (25 June 1949): 'We made demands on the creative talent in the industry that were beyond its resources.'

There were probably, though, two reasons for the abandoning of I.F.: the nature of the resulting product, and finance. I.F. was of the studio; it encouraged stylisation. But the dominant ethos during the late 40s was for greater realism, a move away from the studio. Asked about I.F. at a meeting of the British Kinema Society and ACAT in May 1949, Sir Michael Balcon said: 'The whole of my personal approach to film-making is in the opposite direction. We like working on actual locations and I personally would like to make films without working in studios.' Witness the fact that Ealing built a Pimlico street front on a bomb site in Lambeth.

Financially, the I.F. system was a victim of the decline in film production at the time. (Many of its ideas, after all, have subsequently been absorbed into everyday television studio design and practice.) I.F. began when the Rank organisation was buoyant; the system's second stage, the Aquila films, coincided with the imposition in 1947 of the Dalton import duty on American films and the resulting Hollywood boycott. This statutory order left Rank with 559 theatres to supply and with little new product to supply them with, which might explain why the second stage of the I.F. experiment went ahead before technical development was ready for it. But in March 1948 Harold Wilson, then at the Board of Trade, removed the Dalton duty; and the circuits were flooded with the American films which had been held up to avoid paying it. The emergency productions which had been Rank's response to the short supply of films were now faced with unequal competition.

With a £16 million overdraft, Rank was forced to cut film production and I.F. was abandoned. It has been estimated that Rank's losses on the experiment were in the region of £600,000, leading one critic wag to suggest that it was Mr. Rank who had been framed. Ironically, the lightweight mobile rostra, on which most of the sets were built, proved to be extremely useful and were still in use at Pinewood in 1977.

**'The artificiality of this (design centred) approach was carried to a dead end of absurdity in Britain in the late 40s with the introduction (and rapid abandonment) of the Independent Frame, a system which gave absolute control to the function of design on grounds of economy. The result was a total absence of the freedom to improvise which in the current third phase of cinema has become recognised as vital.'**

—Thorold Dickinson,  
*A Discovery of Cinema*

*I would like to thank Vic Margutti (Pinewood) and Dr. Fred Gloyne (Rank Film Laboratories), both now retired, for their help in providing information about Independent Frame.—J.P.*

# UNGRATIFIED DESIRE

## Nicolas Roeg's Bad Timing

John Pym



'Bad Timing': Theresa Russell, Art Garfunkel

*Bad Timing*, the fifth feature directed by Nicolas Roeg, opens in London shortly. It is reviewed here by John Pym, and on page 113 John Izod analyses *Walkabout*, the film Roeg made in Australia a decade ago and in its own way another hapless love story.

'What is it men in women do desire?/The lineaments of gratified desire./What is it women do in men require?/The lineaments of gratified desire.' Blake's caustic lines do not, of course, tell the whole story. They have,

however, a pleasing ring, which is perhaps why Alex Linden, the psychoanalytic researcher from whose point of view Nicolas Roeg's *Bad Timing* is principally told, is prompted to read them—without irony—to his new mistress, Milena Flaherty. He is lying happily in a rumpled bed; she emerges from the bathroom and impishly summons him to some novel delight.

The contemplative Alex (Art Garfunkel), an American academic teaching in Vienna, although aged somewhere in his late thirties

or early forties, has that telling modern air of retarded youthfulness. Personal responsibilities have so far eluded him. At one point he sports an improbable tweed three-piece suit, almost as if to reassure himself that he is indeed in the right profession. In contrast, the genuinely youthful Milena (Theresa Russell), a woman of apparently independent means, is the very embodiment of ingenuous self-assurance and a greedy (wholly youthful) sexual rapacity: her shadowy, mercurial life is predicated solely, it seems, on a purblind desire for self-gratification. She has not so much eluded responsibility as refused to recognise its existence.

Roeg establishes the film's base tone of languorous (ultimately worm-eaten) eroticism in the opening moments: the camera lovingly traverses a canvas by Gustav Klimt: sun streams hazily through a window, but the gallery in which the painting hangs remains in a soothing half-light. Later, at a party, Milena forthrightly propositions the stranger Alex. Had the dress she was so provocatively wearing—a strapless number with a shimmering, multi-coloured top—been in fashion in turn-of-the-century Vienna, Klimt, one feels sure, would have approved. Later still, immediately after the scene in which Alex reads the Blake epigram, Alex and Milena are again found in the gallery, considering Klimt's 'The Kiss'. She remarks that the cricked lovers seem happy. 'That's because,' he replies with unconscious prescience, 'they don't know each other well enough yet.'

To echo a remark made by Jan Dawson, apropos *Performance*, it would in some ways be easier to write a book rather than an essay on *Bad Timing*. The viewer's speculations are encouraged at every turn, thanks largely to what have now become Roeg's hallmarks: the beguiling pattern of visual cross-references; the discontinuous narrative, which shades towards the end—before one has time to realise it—into a 'mystery'; in particular, perhaps, the virtuoso juggling with time and coincidence. Nevertheless, on one level at least, the film traces in a relatively straightforward manner the course of Alex's journey from a casually held belief in the sufficiency of 'the lineaments of gratified desire' to his disillusionment with this now debased notion in his final, purgatorial 'ravishment' of the senseless Milena.

Written by the playwright and film critic Yale Udoff, *Bad Timing* (or *Illusions* as it was originally, and perhaps more suggestively, titled) covers in the present tense the late-night, early-morning struggle by the staff of a Viennese hospital to save Milena from the effects of a self-administered overdose of drugs. Alex, whom she has telephoned after swallowing the pills, has accompanied her to the hospital, and spends the night being questioned first by a quizzical young policeman and then by the anxious Inspector Netusil (Harvey Keitel). The latter, by doggedly worrying away at Alex's version of the chronology of events after the moment he received Milena's call, slowly begins to suspect that something untoward has occurred. During the interrogation, which later moves from the hospital to Milena's disarrayed apartment, flashbacks—hair-triggered by Alex's memories and by independent visual associations—outline the

charged, fractured course of Alex and Milena's affair.

Commenting, some six years ago during a SIGHT AND SOUND interview, on the drummed-up 'outcry' in the popular press against the 'frankness' of the love-making in *Don't Look Now*, Roeg maintained—and time has proved his wish fulfilled—that he 'wanted to get a reality... of two human beings.' In *Bad Timing* he has again succeeded, though this time the scope is broader and the focus sharper, in catching the 'reality' of two ill-suited human beings who have the misfortune to fall into a casual liaison (romance hardly enters the picture), and find that at first temperamental and intellectual incompatibility sharpens rather than dulls their sexual coupling. There is a particular 70s edge to what soon becomes their self-consuming predicament. Alex, a student of the 60s, has risen by easy stages, one can imagine, to the comparative security of a doctorate. (He still clings to a youthful waywardness: the single lecture he is seen to deliver is based upon a game-playing theatrical slide-show.) The girl who sets her predatory eye on him is neither a contemporary (no Laura to his John Baxter), nor a helpmate (no Mary Lou to his Thomas Jerome Newton), but rather a peculiarly neurotic cat-like beauty with a considerable, paradoxical capacity for both duplicity and, on her own terms, fidelity.

Roeg and Udoff shade in the details of this relationship with a rare, economic intensity. Alex's initial, rather spineless acceptance of Milena's continuing sexual relationships with other men, among them the bovine actor Konrad (whose presence is several times acutely felt—a German translation of Pinter's *No Man's Land* is glimpsed among Milena's possessions—though he utters not a word throughout the film), stems from a classically mistaken belief that eventually she will recognise the virtues of commitment and agree, as he proposes on a Moroccan holiday, to marriage and the 'security' of academic life in Manhattan.

The vicissitudes of their relationship—his happy surrender to her animal vitality (she pulls him with a giggle on to Freud's couch), her readiness to coerce him into forgiveness after one of her flings—culminate in a bravura climax in which a drunken Milena, a creature of action rather than words, dresses and makes-up as a gross parody of the insensate woman that she believes Alex wishes her to become. After an acrimonious exchange, Alex leaves and is compelled to sidestep, with characteristic diffidence, the volley of bottles Milena hurls from an upper window on to the night street below.

Speaking of *Don't Look Now*, Roeg has drawn attention to the universal fear of broken glass; and in this scene he succeeds—partly through the sheer clarity of image—in investing the explosion of a bottle with a palpably ominous significance. An 'object'—and the film is studded with other examples: pieces of costume jewellery; a mundane cigarette; a rock crystal filled with sand—becomes not, in this case, a symbol of Milena's rage, but an 'animate' adjunct to it.

Cuckolded, assaulted and perversely degraded by Milena (she at one point orders him to 'rape' her on the stairs of her apartment building to avenge his assumption that she is *always* sexually available), Alex finally finds himself called to her apartment

not, as has happened on an earlier occasion, on a fool's errand, but to find Milena unconscious on the floor. He debates with himself what to do. She has led him such a dance that perhaps it would be kinder to let her die. In the end he cuts off her undergarments with the pocket knife with which he was nervously toying at the party when she first propositioned him, lifts her carefully on to the bed, contemplates the 'lineaments' of her body, hesitates and then, in what may be interpreted as a definitive act of rejection, rapes her. Inspector Netusil suspects this is what happened, and indeed—expecting Milena to die—has constructed an elaborate case against Alex. All he needs, confronting Alex with a soiled sheet, is a confession, a cathartic, 'psychoanalytic' release from the burdens of the past. He doesn't get it; Milena survives; and the question of 'ravishment' becomes of only academic interest.

There is really no 'mystery'. Roeg teases the spectator with references to time: the casual shots of clocks and watches early in the film seem to have no importance until one realises that Alex has been lying about the time which elapsed between Milena's plea for help and his final summons to the ambulance. Roeg seems to be saying: You see how useful it is to be able to re-run time; to prove the distinction between fantasy (Alex's own half-disbelief that he committed the rape) and reality (Netusil's proof that he did). There is, too, really no 'mystery' about Milena. Alex, who finds himself playing games of hide-and-seek with Netusil, cannot accept or comprehend Milena's games of hide-and-seek with him. The key to her personality, if such a thing exists, would not, one suspects, be revealed by Alex's psychoanalytic researches: she prefers the quick, dotty answer to her personality provided by the Luscher Colour Test (it finds, unsurprisingly, that she has a considerable sexual appetite). Her 'secrets' are inflated by Alex's jealousy: she has a Czech husband Stefan (played with laconic effect by Denholm Elliott) whom she makes no bones about going back to visit in Bratislava; a treasured photograph shows herself and her dead brother, and not some clandestine lover.

What distinguishes this melodramatic 'love story', however, is the singularly compelling manner of its telling: counterpointed to the base tone is another of latent unease. The polite policeman who begins the interrogation actually suggests a time that Alex might have called the ambulance: his eyes, though, tell another story. When Alex visits the Czech Embassy in Vienna to enquire how a 'friend' might obtain a divorce, the sharp, wary official who deflects his request is sitting at a desk in an *overcoat*; a secretary at an adjoining desk turns and stares fixedly at the discomforted Alex. In Morocco, when their car breaks down in the wilderness, Alex and Milena are obliged to beg a lift from two Arabs; bumping along in the back of the open lorry, Alex peers through the dusty back window at Milena squeezed between the two men—anxiety hangs in the air, and is not retrospectively dispelled when, in a hotel lobby, Milena makes plain her distaste for the continuing importunity of one of the men.

Coupled to this air of unease, and in contrast to the quicksilver cross-cutting, is a gradually developed sense of the melancholy

not only of Alex and Milena's individual lives but also, though on another plane altogether, of that of Stefan. The flashbacks begin with a masterfully understated scene on a bridge spanning the Danube, at either end of which are the Czech and Austrian border posts: on the soundtrack the gravel-voiced Tom Waits issues 'an invitation to the blues'; Stefan looks at Milena and then gently eases off her wedding ring; she offers a matching look of determination and accepted regret and then takes back the ring. 'You will call?' he asks. 'It's not really like going away,' she replies. 'For you,' he says.

On another occasion, towards the end of the film, Roeg draws attention just once to the fragility of Milena's self-assurance. In a crowded university thoroughfare, having discovered Alex's suspicion that the photograph of her dead brother is that of an unknown lover, Milena dissolves into tears at her sudden, naive disappointment in Alex's trust: the background and the sound of the student babble fades, and for a moment (hackneyed though the device may sound) we are drawn into her misery.

Roeg and Udoff complicate their portrait of Alex, on the surface, and as played by Art Garfunkel, rather a plodding individual, by giving him a double, Inspector Netusil. (The implications of this will, one estimates, provoke the most argument and disagreement about the film as a whole.) Suffice to say in this context that Netusil becomes, in a sense, the *logical* foil to the *instinctual* Alex. And that in the end he attempts, by dropping all logic and appealing to Alex's feelings, to both defeat him and 'become' him.\*

More resonant and clearly worked out, to this writer at least, is the less strained pairing of Alex and Stefan. Divided from Milena not only by his age (he has, for one thing, an older, lived-in face), but also by the culture to which he belongs, Stefan nevertheless shares with Alex the same uncontrollable passion. Stefan has gracefully surrendered, hoping that Milena will eventually return to him for good. Alex, who has the same desire, resorts to cajolery, where Stefan retreated into silence. The two men are brought together for the first time by Milena's attempted suicide: the act which irrevocably separates her from both of them. Stefan materialises in the apartment, just as Netusil has admitted that Milena will live and abandoned his attempt to extract a confession from Alex. 'What did you get from her, Dr Linden?' Stefan asks. 'Not enough, I think. You must understand, you see, it's not enough to love a woman when she is difficult. You must love her tremendously, more even than one's own dignity. Don't you agree?' To which ambiguous, endlessly debatable assertion he receives no reply.

In the film's coda, Alex glimpses Milena from a Manhattan taxi. He vainly calls her name. The camera picks out the long scar on her neck from the tracheotomy which saved her life. Roeg cuts to a parallel long shot of the calm and stately Danube. ■

\*Netusil, one gathers from a quick tracking shot, has a degree from Harvard. And—entering the spirit of Roegian free association—one is tempted to recall an observation by John V. Kelleher, the Harvard authority on James Joyce: after many years of labour with the allusive entanglements of *Finnegans Wake*, he admitted to a certain weariness and a refreshing fondness for the allusive brevity of the story *Clay*.

# WALKABOUT!



## A WASTED JOURNEY?

John Izod

Nicolas Roeg's *Walkabout* (1971) is built around a simple story. Two city-dwelling children are driven by their father into the Australian desert, ostensibly for a picnic. There, after trying to shoot his young son, the father burns the car and kills himself. Left to try to find their own way home, the children soon lose their way hopelessly. Exhausted and without water, they are rescued from the death they have no capacity to escape by a young aborigine. He leads them to safety, and in the course of their journey falls in love with the girl. Unable to get her to respond, he despairs, performs a ritual dance for her, and kills himself. The white children make their way home, and a brief coda shows the girl a few years later living a life very much like her mother's.

Not only a variety of incident, but an astonishing succession of often unexpected aural and visual images flesh out this simple plot and make of it, with little dialogue, a parable of biblical density. Not only are there indeed allusions to the Christian story, but the medieval elements, earth, air, fire and water, figure emphatically. And Roeg is like his literary forebears in looking beyond the elements to first causes; but where they discover God he reveals through the dissolving dilation of irises ringing the sun and the electronic swirling of Stockhausen's *Hymnen* the electric silence of the desert, the primacy of energy. Energy from the sun blends with the energy of life forms under the sun—the photography repeatedly makes the link—and the desert, seemingly dead, is found to crackle with life. Its creatures are real, yet in their strangeness fantastic—dragons and monsters. They alone often give the film the appearance of fantasy or vision, and as we shall see many of Roeg's filmic devices work to enhance that appearance.

The film soon establishes an opposition which also has roots in a medieval symbolic system by contrasting the lush public gardens of the city (where the film begins) with the apparently dead wilderness. Thus Roeg and his scenarist Edward Bond seem to echo the traditional contrast between Paradise and wilderness. And indeed that contrast would seem apposite to the condition of the white children when, abandoned, they start their helpless search for home. But by the end of their journey, when the black boy has shown



Top: Lucien John and Jenny Agutter  
left: David Gumpilil

them life, food, even water, the desert has become a generous sanctuary. And the meagre patch of green which they first step on to when they return to a town is no paradise but property to be kept off. The symbols have during the course of the film been switched, a process which we shall follow.

Having rescued her young brother and witnessed her father's suicide, the girl hurriedly gathers whatever comes to hand from the picnic and leads her brother into the desert. They make an incongruous pair, primly dressed in school uniforms which look more English than Australian. And they lack any sense of bushcraft, making for instance no attempt to look for the car's wheel tracks. Naturally they lose themselves at once. Shocked more than in their peril she dare admit to herself, the girl, who in her teens is some half-dozen years older than her brother, adopts the role of cajoling mother. Her mother's voice informs her own as she preoccupies herself with, of all things, the little boy's tidiness, and leads him on with expectations that every next ridge will show them home.

Now the children climb vast ridges of stone, and see for miles. We remember how Roeg has shown in the town stone massed into walls that, though they give shelter, cut off the sight from any long view. The point has been made by an early shot in which the camera starts in blank close-up on a brick wall and tracks across it to reveal, as if by a wipe, the visual confusion of a city street. Later, as the father prepares to drive his children out to destruction, the camera repeats the shot, but tracks off the wall into the empty desert. We are given notice that the film will have much to do with seeing, knowing.

Their food and drink finished, the children are ploughing on through barren sand towards extinction when the boy sights a tree from his sister's back. In his exhaustion he has slipped upside down, and we first see the tree this way. It signals the moment at which their world turns upside down again, and interestingly the moment at which symbolic values begin to shift. For this is both a tree of life and more.

Hung with delicious fruit, this unknown tree stands over a small pool, and the children eat from it, drink, and presently sleep. Trees are to recur as signifying images throughout *Walkabout*, and have already been seen in the city park where they bear labels, but for all that they are 'known' are unused. This tree, obviously a life-giver, yet has important differences from the biblical image. During the night a furry mammal visits the children, and a snake moves across the branches. Thus intimations of Edenic innocence mix with the idea of knowledge. As a Freudian figure the snake counterpoints nicely the contrast between the girl's physical sexuality and her emotional denial of that maturity.\* As a Jungian image the snake can imply a potential for psychic change in the subject which may give rise to fear. In the event the

girl will allow her fears to inhibit her from taking on the new, fulfilled maturity which both her unconscious and her circumstances will shortly offer her.

Water also recurs as an informative image. Early in the film the father looks out from the balcony of the family's flat. In the distance, almost at the horizon, lies the sea. Yet his children, whom he is watching, swim not there but in a swimming pool at the foot of the building. A potential contrast is set up between the sea, which because brine cannot be drunk has long been associated with death, and the pool. The blue waters of the pool look chemically clean but, boxed in a small flowerless lawn, cramped in comparison with the expanse of the sea. If we read this conjunction as a preliminary evocation of life seen in the context of death, then life, though safe in town, is lived parsimoniously there; and death has been pushed beyond walls, almost out of sight. But no such security invests the life-saving water under the desert tree. During the night it drains away and the birds eat the fruit. The marvellous, the unknown, confronts the children again. They awaken and face despair once more. But then, sprinting out of the desert, and like some skilful dervish in his pursuit of giant lizards, the black boy comes by chance upon them. When he understands their predicament, he shows them how to find water beneath the empty pool with a straw. Thus the principal association of this tree remains life; but it links life subtly with knowledge, ignorance and death.

When the black boy realises that the white children are lost, and not like him following the aborigine's great and lonely road to adulthood, he takes them a little regretfully into care, and their great journey begins. The journey itself becomes established as one of the primary motifs of the film; and its very familiarity as an organising archetype in a multitude of fictions makes it a useful way of signifying in shorthand some of the film's themes. This journey turns full circle, starting and ending in the enclosed life of the city. The father, as despair overwhelms him, drives off the main road into unmarked ways. His children, totally without signposts, lose themselves in unknown terrain. For his part the aborigine boy leads them by secret paths—they have the chance to learn new methods of finding their way through unmapped territory. Ultimately, the black boy in his own despair will end his journey before the girl and her brother step on the familiar metalled road which takes them back exactly to where they started. The complete cycle is ironically pre-echoed by the refrain of Rod Stewart's 'Gasoline Alley' which has been heard early in the film:

Going home, running home  
Down to Gasoline Alley where I started from.  
Going home, running home  
Down to Gasoline Alley where I was born.†

As they go on and on, the characters of the three young people establish themselves. The black boy, even without English, reveals himself to be a complete person; he knows his environment and lives joyfully in it, taking only what he needs for survival. The white girl, hesitant and nervous, continues to respect and urge on her brother the

proprieties family and society have drilled into her, and which sit on her in these circumstances as absurdly as her school hat. The little boy, however, begins to learn from his new companion some of his bushcraft, and significantly some of his language. His sister learns none, except shame-facedly the word for water—when the black boy came to their rescue she had shouted despairingly at him 'Water! Water!' And she simply shouted louder when he didn't understand: 'Water! Surely anyone can understand that?' In the end the little boy had to show by sign language what they needed, already showing his adaptability.

The white children differ also in their reaction to their unaccustomed exposure to the sun. The girl keeps herself cautiously shielded from it, but her brother early on gets painfully burned. Toward the end of the journey, however, he is very brown and goes about without his shirt, thoroughly acclimatised. Now, again familiarly, the sun has long served as the source of light and life to symbolise both knowledge and passion. And the conjunction informs the image of the girl walking under a makeshift parasol devised from flimsy picnic cloths and the dead branch of a tree, hiding from the warmth she could enjoy.

Isolated though she is, she receives some reassurance from the radio they carry. It delivers a series of programmes, evidently for the socially gauche (sc. the entire nation?), which prescribe with dismaying pedantry the most fastidious minutiae of etiquette. By this means the enclosed life at home—we have seen her mother work in the kitchen listening to such a programme—is recalled and the audience can measure its absurdity against the stricter economy of life in the open. And the girl continues from time to time to worry about her brother's appearance.

At one point the three rest under some more trees, and a game develops. The black boy and the girl hoist the little boy into a tree and make him hang there upside down. Then the black boy lifts the girl into the tree fork, and she too swings by her legs. In the excitement of the game (her world turned upside down?) she relaxes, forgets to worry about her modesty and delights in the freedom of her body. The camera reinforces the association of community, joy and sexuality by selecting angles on the branches which emphasise the likeness of swellings in the fork to the female genitals. And then at the same time Roeg intercuts these shots unexpectedly with shots of aborigines exploring the father's burnt-out car and of his charred body, which has been stretched grotesquely in a dead tree. The tree motif again couples life and death in a mysterious conjunction whose potential is not fully articulated until the last appearance of the image near the end of the film.

For the moment it will be helpful, since we have encountered a striking example, to consider the methods by which the film has been shot and assembled. They are methods which make the simple journey an involved maze that arouses wonder and ultimately rewards it, for a battery of devices is employed to make the surface of the film both beautiful and strange. Stills, sudden lockings into and out of freeze frames, embellished wipes, optical blow-ups, extreme wide angle lenses, hand held shots, superimposition, reverse motion, dramatic zooms, evocative

\* The image of a woman in schoolgirl's clothing is a pornographic archetype. Earlier, as the girl was bending to set out the picnic at her father's instruction, the camera shifted forward as if to pry beneath her skirt. The movement seems to hint that her father feels an unwelcome attraction towards his daughter, which his wordless gazing at her might confirm.

† It seems legitimate to juxtapose gasoline and water since the father dies in burning petrol.



*Journey through the wilderness: David Gumpilil, Jenny Agutter, Lucien John*

electronic effects, music verging into effects, quotations both of music and words, all figure from time to time. So no uninterrupted window on to the world is offered here. Everything beautiful, strange and surprising is intended to make you see, to invite you to connect across wide dislocations: the surface of the film carries an inscription designed to have its audiences take an adventurous journey of the mind which the girl will not, to see where she will not look.

The film's frequent recourse to intercutting between ongoing narrative action and entirely unexpected scenes contributes to this dislocating method, which requires the audience to make its own associations. A simple instance occurs when the black boy hacks apart a kangaroo he has killed for food, and the messy scene is intercut with a butcher chopping and wrapping neat parcels of meat. Another example, typical of the many times the film's inserts hang allusively free from location in time or in relation to character or narrative, occurs when the children see the ghostly figures of topee-wearing camel riders passing them. Is this a memory of the Burke and Wills expedition, an idea conjured in the little boy's head, or a vision arising from the desert? We never receive the information necessary to categorise this scene, and it remains an unexplained marvel of the desert, one of the many devices which enrich the fantastic coruscations of the film.

As these examples suggest, Roeg has had his film cut in a manner which reveals time and again a very full debt to Eisenstein's idea of intellectual montage. Brutally summarised, Eisenstein's notion is that the conflict between two elements (usually shots) placed in juxtaposition causes the viewer to create a *tertium quid*, a new idea which was contained in neither of the conflicting elements. The association by juxtaposition of hunter and butcher typifies this kind of relation, in that

the conjunction of the two readily allows the audience to perceive the *tertium quid*, the implication that the butcher serves a pampered society. Roeg, however, commonly scatters fragmentary scenes more widely across the text, and they constitute each a unit of information which the viewer cannot gather back into a unity of meaning by juxtaposing it with the next shot. For generally the next piece in each section of the puzzle will be found some way on through the film.

Thus when in the middle of the children's game the film intercuts fragmented shots of the aborigine group at the wrecked car (and cuts back and forth between the two scenes and the body of the father), someone by chance switches on the radio, and the shot changes to a high and wide angle as the people nervously back away into the desert while the metal voice rattles on. But why Roeg dislocates his narrative with this minor episode can only be understood when the radio has been observed in use throughout the film. Motifs do a great deal in this film to signpost its themes. The radio, more than a mere toy of the consumer society, is eventually seen as a marvellous box. (The black boy stealthily turns it on one night while the others sleep. Can he speak English?) Associated through its production of skeins of electronic sound with the whorls of energy heard when the sun is pictured, it has potential as a distributor of other kinds of energy—ideas, emotions. The blacks fear it needlessly, and the whites use it foolishly. Its magic potential finally declares itself when, left in the desert as broken, it turns itself on again just as the children, some miles away, are remarking on its breakdown.

Some of the intrusions into the narrative which now follow bulk large enough to become independent scenes. They show several groups of people pursuing lives very

different from the children's. Coarse and brutal in a variety of ways, these outlandish groups signify alternative routes through life which define negatively the positive way which, until the end of their journey, it remains possible for the three young people to find.

One of these unexpected scenes discovers a parody of Fellini. A group of meteorologists, predominantly Italian men and a single woman, are lackadaisically releasing weather balloons. All are middle-aged and masked with the grotesque leers of bored sexuality. They seem to stand on the edge of an invisible sea (the wide-angle lens pushes the horizon almost out of sight). As their radio spills out laconic Italian pop music, the men shift ridiculously to the rhythm of the seated woman's movements, gawping ludicrously for a glimpse of breast or thigh. Such sexuality is the death of love: sex and death touch again. And the point is made by the cutaway to the next scene in which the girl swims alone in the dark waters of a sheltered pool. Here she is free, sensual and lovely. In every sense in the water she finds grace.

Later there occurs another incident which embodies the idea of dead sexuality, and which does touch one of the group. The black boy on his own approaches an encampment where frantic whites harass aborigine workers as they attempt to produce plaster kangaroos for a distant tourist market. A white prostitute invites the boy (in English) to go with her. He refuses (in his own tongue, but he has understood her well enough), and leads the others, who have not seen the encounter, back into the safe desert. One of the foremen goes into the prostitute's house.

Soon the black boy leads his party to an abandoned farmhouse in a rare green place. Having sent the white boy about some errand, he courts the girl, offering her a home in the old tin-roofed building in sign language which she cannot but understand, but which,

as her fears of releasing herself rise, she refuses to admit even to herself. Presently she dismisses him with a request for water—though she speaks her one word of his tongue, she insists on the English word too, which he echoes sadly: his only word spoken in English. It still does not occur to the girl to question her assured belief, which she has announced condescendingly in his presence, that he cannot speak her language. But it may be that he does understand (there have been hints) and refuses to sully the ritual of his journey by the use of any tongue other than his own.\* This single moment when the should-be lovers exchange the one word 'water' underlines for the audience how resolutely the girl has reduced that element from its sacramental role to its domestic uses.

Now the black boy gathers up his white friend, rushes him through the bush to a nearby road (these two chatter by now fairly freely in his language), and makes sure he knows where to find it again. As he turns back a jeep driven by white hunters roars off the road, knocks him aside, and runs into the great plain beyond. This and the following scene pass so hectically that whether the hunters appear in actuality, in memory, or in vision is never clearly known. In whatever mode of presence, the boy has to witness wanton slaughter of the plain's teeming animal life as the whites destroy more creatures than they could possibly want for food. The pointless carnage decides him. We may deduce that the evidence of this scene, of the factory camp, and of the girl's refusal to acknowledge his decent approach, reveal to him that only power impresses whites. He goes to an animal graveyard (perhaps that left by the whites) and paints himself as a skeleton. Death and love touch again, and he prepares himself either for success in his suit or for final retreat. Now he begins for the girl a strange dance, both aggressive and gentle. For if some of the movements imply the warrior, the tender offering of the flowers he carries promises war against her only in her own defence.

She, understandably, retreats at once into herself in terror. But as the evening passes into night and the boy's dance grows weary and sad, she has time to understand. She does not. Unable to do better than mumble to her brother a suggestion of her overwrought fear that the black boy might attempt some unspeakable thing, she lies quietly without looking at him and reduces it all ultimately to the absurd notion that he might mean to kill them. Which her young brother quite rightly derides.

The black boy dances on to exhaustion, deflecting his violence against himself. When the brother and sister awaken they find that he has prepared his own burial—his body hangs in a mango tree. The image of him recalls of course that of their father buried in a dead tree, and more esoterically that ancient emblem of Christ on the Cross, who from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century could be emblematically represented as the loveliest fruit of the tree. As the girl leaves the black boy, she touches his chest absent-mindedly. It is a kind of confirmation of unconscious knowledge, an unwitting salute to his beauty. Here too is a tree of love and death and (un)knowing.

Though tactfully, the film makes available a number of points of contact between the black boy's life and that of Christ. He leads the others through the wilderness and feeds them. He teaches, although only one of his companions listens to him; and both his life and death indicate his devotion to what makes his life sacred. But his sacrifice differs in its meaning from that of Christ, and Roeg's reworking of an ancient symbolism organises this theme.

The principal difference is that in the traditional Christian schema each tree invokes one aspect of the human cycle: in Paradise there stand the trees of Life and Knowledge; and the Cross is the tree of Death. Each tree recalls the others (the Cross, for instance, brings the promise of future life), but they remain distinct. Roeg, on the other hand, has been at some pains to have several of his trees evoke more than one point in the cycle, even showing living people as the lovely fruit of one. Unlike those in Paradise, the trees in Roeg's Australian desert have not been created by divine fiat. Because their existence is hard won there are few, and they catch the eye. They flourish and fruit using the primary sources of energy this film so often and so dramatically presents: earth, water, and the heat and light of the sun. In this way these trees resemble the archetypal tree which Jungians recognise as a figure for the growth and development, ultimately to self-realisation, of the human psyche.

Roeg's insistent association of life and death reminds us that they both belong to the human life cycle along with sexuality. To fulfil their natural cycle, the young people should at the very least reproduce. Even at this simple level of achievement the boy's sacrifice, futile for all its nobility as a gesture, has been differentiated from Christ's. But the full use of the energy available to humanity permits us an altogether fuller life than the reproductive cycle alone entails. As the analogy with trees suggests, the human psyche receives and transforms energy in addition to giving it out. In this sense Roeg likens his characters to the radio. The girl, when in full control of herself, is in tune with an absurd programme; but the radio becomes a marvellous box when it moves off station and harmonises with the electronic music of the universe. So it is for humanity too. The girl not only traps energy (repressed desire) she will not release, but she will not allow herself more than momentarily to open up to the unknown, to admit new life. She misses the marvellous. By contrast the black boy has faced the unknown and come to know it in committing himself to the white children; and the little boy has learned to reciprocate.

To make the point that *Walkabout* is more than a failed love story, Roeg brings his white children back into society and allows his audience to contemplate with new eyes its condition. As the girl steps for the first time back on to tarmac, an extreme low-angled shot discovers her renewed sense of authority as, fully uniformed, she steps back also into ways that she knows. The first person whom they manage to find lives as the last tenant in an abandoned mining village. The crabbed owner of the only patch of green in the desolation of his ruined street, this bitter man gives them what is to be their welcome back to urban society: 'Keep off the grass! You must keep off the grass!' There is water here,

but he lets it sprinkle only his own sparse patch. The delights of paradise could hardly be further removed than from this decorous and cramped green waste—paradise has fled the urban garden back to the wilderness.

The end of the film, a coda, mirrors its beginning. Just as at the beginning, a man, younger but all too like the father in sedate suit and commuter's car, leaves his office and returns home. There another woman—it is the girl a few years later but now all too like her mother—waits to greet her husband. Now some ten years older, she has retreated into her mother's life and an awful blankness, which the ugly pan make-up that masks her face clearly signals. This is the face of a person who has not found release for her energy either of mind or spirit. In her naked want of grace she stands with the other town-dwellers we have seen as an indictment of that society.

When her husband comes into the flat, he kisses her and gives her news of changes at his office which will lead to his promotion and better pay. As he talks a slight movement disturbs her unexpectant face. She looks away, and we see with her a vision of a moment on the journey that never occurred. The three young people swim together in the beautiful pool. Where in actuality she had swum alone, in her vision there exists between her and the black boy an ease in their shining bodies, and a grace in their shared joy. As we watch we hear A. E. Housman's lament from *A Shropshire Lad* for a lost state of grace:

That is the land of lost content,  
I see it shining plain,  
The happy highways where I went  
And cannot come again.

It has perhaps not been sufficiently noticed that the girl's loss is not of a perfect past—that never happened—but of a possible future. This fact and the film's dialectical method redeem it from what would otherwise be pastoralism—a sentimental evocation of an impossible arcadia. Indeed if we are tempted to regard the black boy as the noble savage, the film's unquestioned ideal, we respond only to the differences between his suicide and that of the father. But there are likenesses too, and the boy's youth alone makes his suicide especially futile. The film does not seek for perfection in past or present life, but looks instead for the creation of some new third thing for the future.

It will be remembered that the central tenet of Eisenstein's theory of montage is that there arises from the dialectical conflict of elements something altogether new—that  $1+1=3$ . Ultimately that third thing in *Walkabout* is the possible future. These young people do not achieve it, but its sensed potential gives the film much of its tension. All three children have so much to offer each other that the audience experiences the pain of their failure to stay together. Love is at stake, and more.

A number of hints (the family describe themselves as English; the appearance of the school uniforms; Housman's verse; Roeg's own nationality) suggest that the Australian plot may conceal a parable for England. And England's stagnation is a more familiar theme than Australia's. In so far as *Walkabout* permits the conversion of its evident pessimism to optimism, it is that we, unlike Roeg's characters, still have a possible future. ■

\* I owe this thought, and a more extensive general debt, to Basil Wright's sensitive reading in *The Long View* (St Albans, 1976) pp. 572–75.

Richard Combs

# LESS IS DON SIEGEL FROM THE BLOCK TO THE ROCK

One of the inevitable rituals of *Escape from Alcatraz* takes place in the shower room, where the new inmate, Frank Morris (Clint Eastwood), is approached by the Rock's current bully boy, Wolf, who leeringly announces that he is looking for a new 'punk'. Wolf's sexual suggestion results, satisfyingly and none too gently, in his having his mouth washed out with soap. But a more significant riposte comes earlier, in a first exchange of taunting pleasantries. Wolf: 'Where'd they transfer you from?' Morris: 'Atlanta.' Wolf: 'Nice town, Atlanta.' Morris: 'I never saw it.' As economic a distillation of prison experience as one would expect of both the film and its star, the line is prepared for by a speech of the Warden's ('From this day on, your world will be everything that happens in this building') and translated into one image that persistently punctuates the story and all routine on the Rock: Alcatraz Island, nestled in San Francisco Bay, with the city and the other world it represents in unbridgeable proximity.

*'Escape from Alcatraz': Clint Eastwood*



This view, repeated from a variety of positions and in a variety of weathers, is the film in a nutshell, and one might reject the whole by dismissing the detail as conventional, atmospheric scene-setting. But Don Siegel's imagery is as spare as the dialogue—which would make such a lapse into visual cliché unlikely—and in the overall stylisation of the film, the shots of the island are no more or less realistic than the dialogue, teetering between the irreducibly functional and the potentially abstract. They signal the essential metaphor in a film that is not 'about' prison life except in purely imagistic terms: the island within the city, cells within cells. And they are tightly suggestive of a pattern that is really the 'story' of the film: the opening shot is the only one to connect island, harbour and city with pointed camera movement, as Morris is ferried out to the prison; the final sequence is the only one where the action as well as the camera is placed outside Alcatraz, as the puzzled authorities searching Angel Island look back at the Rock, which has become defunct as an escape-proof prison (it was closed, an end title states, less than a year after the real-life disappearance of Frank Morris and the Anglin brothers) and now houses only a conundrum.

*Escape from Alcatraz* might best be described as a puzzle movie, and not simply because we never learn what happens to its escapees, after their life-raft built-for-three out of *Popular Mechanics* disappears into the darkness. Its theme might be summarised in the image of a Chinese box, and in his sparsely organised *mise en scène* Siegel imposes the image at every turn of the story. Even on a narrative level, this repeating chamber effect, the geometrical symmetry of the problem, is all: once the men are out, once the puzzle is cracked, it is irrelevant what happens to them in another world.

A further pleasing symmetry is that *Escape from Alcatraz* should pick up from the film that was Siegel's breakthrough as a director, *Riot in Cell Block 11* (1954), even to the conditions of its making. Both were shot inside actual prisons, with a minimum of studio work and largely unknown casts (including real convicts for the mass break-out into the yard in *Riot*). For its setting alone, the prison movie might be proposed as the perfect Siegel subject—and *Escape from Alcatraz* his most perfect, completely achieved film, as distilled (in a different way, subject matter notwithstanding) as Bresson.

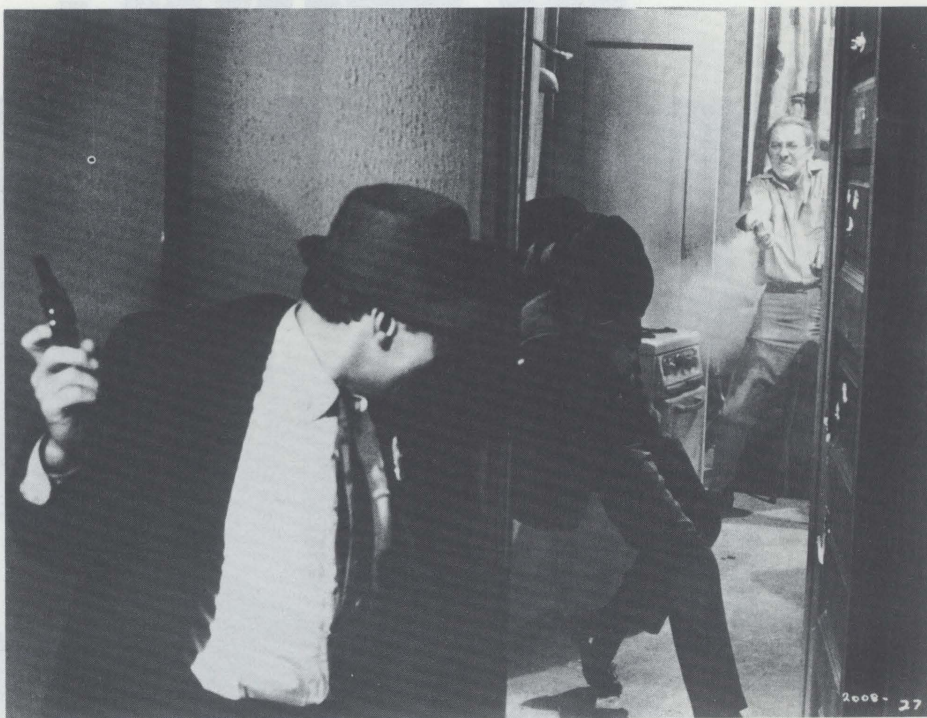
Since he became a cult director in the late 1960s, Siegel has enjoyed three rather uneasily cohabiting reputations. The first two might be traced back to his most renowned films of the 50s. *Riot in Cell Block 11* was a melodramatic exposé prepared and shot as though it were a documentary about the real thing, a protest by the inmates of a punishment block in an overtaxed, inadequate prison; *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) converted this 'social' concern into metaphor, a battle between the shrinking numbers of thinking, feeling, flawed humanity and (in the era of McCarthy) the rest, functional but lifeless 'pod' people. With the flurry of interest in many action directors in the 60s, and the increasing volume of Siegel's work in the underworld/crime thriller mode, he has latterly been celebrated as a genre stylist. The

man who began his career directing 'inserts' or montage sequences for other men's movies, and who has since taken pride in the inventiveness (the multiplicity of angles and set-ups) in his action scenes, has provided a definitive car chase (*The Line-Up*) and shoot-out (*Madigan*). To some critics, he has also undermined or updated the genres by recombining them—Gangster and Western, urban and rural locales in *Death of a Gunfighter*, *Coogan's Bluff* and *Charley Varrick*.

Auteurist interpretation has created most problems for itself when it has tried to harness all three. The mistake with the later films is to assume that, like *Riot* or *Body Snatchers*, they are dramatic excuses or concealed metaphors for good causes. Siegel, consequently, can only be valued as a director if his liberal pedigree can be upheld by proving that, like the convict leader Dunn, Deputy Sheriff Coogan or Dirty Harry can be integrated with progressive themes. The temptation to do so is evident enough, since

detective who goes by the book, look the more inhumane.

Much analysis of Siegel has this earnest humanist bias, suggesting that his thrillers can usefully be put down in the real world, or that they have a positive social orientation. In an article in *Cinema* No. 5, which is otherwise excellent on the generic features of Siegel's films, Robert Mundy claims 'two well-defined and related contrasts around which his films revolve: humanity/inhumanity and rationality/irrationality.' The latter and least generalised of these pairs undoubtedly has some relevance to the many crazed villains and anti-heroes who populate Siegel's films, but the polarity usually has a specific dramatic or structural function rather than a moral one. Even *Riot in Cell Block 11*, which does make out a case for prison reform, and does 'educate' its hero, is defined less by the internal dynamic of rationality/irrationality than by the overriding structural irony (and impasse) of inside/outside. When the Warden describes Dunn for a group of press men—



'Madigan': the definitive shoot-out

even Siegel's most conventional genre subjects usually have a contemporary urban context and a cast of law breakers and enforcers—his protagonists, an unarguably consistent line of defiant loners, outside whatever System is operating, may be interchangeably one side or the other—which seem to beg all sorts of social issues. With effort, the films can be systematised along these lines, as Charles T. Gregory has done in the *Journal of Popular Film* (Winter 1972): 'In his (Siegel's) work there are almost always two major forces in constant conflict: the violent, anti-social, heroic loner and the institutionalised, bureaucratised "system" infested with "pod" people.' Such a formula must be considerably twisted, however, to accommodate a hero like Coogan: in his rugged individualism, his unswerving loyalty to himself and his job, he embodies an American ideal which Gregory comes close to admitting might be a prime symptom rather than the natural enemy of podism. Coogan's ruthless pursuit of his quarry in fact makes him, rather than the bureaucratised city

'He's also a psychopath, like a lot of brilliant men on the outside'—he succinctly puts his problem in context, and emphasises not so much the film's arguments for reform as its sense (in both imagery and structure) of confinement.

In recent Siegel films, it has become even harder, if not impossible, to assign positive and negative moral values—free agents/thinking men versus bureaucrats/pod people. The films are not open, suggesting possibilities of moral growth, but closed, presenting self-contained systems, situations and institutions. Siegel does work in terms of pairings and contrasts, not because they indicate some struggle for improvement but because they serve immediately to polarise his characters—and to frustrate them, since they are as quickly boxed in by the extremity they have chosen (or been driven to). One might add that they also work a similar confusion on the audience—constructive and destructive action seems to have little to do with morally approvable behaviour. In certain situations, constructive action is

scarcely a possibility: effective as he is in dealing with a dangerous psychopath, Dirty Harry is not exactly a positive figure. Siegel's lucidity has less to do with his assertion of humanity or rationality on screen than with his sense of organisation. The inside/outside tension of *Riot in Cell Block 11* shifts the weight of the film from crusading issues to practical ones: can the prisoners organise themselves and their demands into a force equal to the one brought against them. (The theme here is boiled down to a witty motif, of opposition-in-mimicry, in *Escape from Alcatraz*.) If there is a moral sense to this, it is ambiguous, relativistic—there are two sides, usually the reverse of one another, to every situation—which in Siegel's action cinema often means that his heroes are damned if they do and just as much damned if they don't.

Other contradictions tend to work against the kind of all-embracing thematic play-off that Charles Gregory has proposed. That is, even if one doesn't take into account (or takes

*Charley Varrick*, in *SIGHT AND SOUND* Autumn 1973: 'At its heart is a curious individualist ethos which consistently defines its characters in terms of their sexual foibles as people whose lives are governed pragmatically by contradictory private moralities').

There is even a wilfulness in this approach, which makes the usual identification of characters difficult, as witness Siegel's own comments on the psychopathic killer in *Dirty Harry*: 'I do another thing—absolutely, totally irresponsible on my part, and I may be criticised for it. I got the largest buckle I could get, with a slightly lopsided peace symbol on it, and I had my killer wear it. I don't know what the buckle means exactly, but it seems to me that it may remind us that no matter how vicious a person is, when he looks into a mirror he's not capable of seeing the truth about himself.'\* *Dirty Harry*, not surprisingly, was taken as an attack on the freaky, drop-out, anti-Vietnam life-style associated with that buckle, and almost singlehandedly converted Siegel's erstwhile

the interiors to the exteriors. Space as something to be divided up, mapped out, is the dominant motif not only of Siegel's prison movies but of a conspicuously open-air film like *Charley Varrick*, where the Chinese-box motif recurs in connection with the Mafia. But while this fracturing of space immediately looks like an image for something else, the stress which Siegel also puts on time seems (at least by comparison with most movies, where its flow is so nebulous) to serve as a realistic dramatic anchor. *The Shootist* begins with its hero picking up a paper announcing Queen Victoria's death, and proceeds to account for the last week of his own life by numbering each day. Many of Siegel's crime films are built on a race against time, or are closely clocked: his preferred title for *Madigan* was, simply, *Friday, Saturday and Sunday*.

Time and space, naturally enough, have particular relevance in a prison movie. In *Escape from Alcatraz*, they are virtually all there is, because this is one of the most pared-away genre films ever made. A rigorously functional escape drama, concentrating on the step-by-step mechanics of breaking-out, in a unique sense it is, as its baffled critics have claimed, 'nothing more' than an escape movie. The special sophistication of the film, however, is that time and space are also deployed as perfectly formalised elements, concepts of prison life rather than an attempt to reproduce and/or exploit it as an experience. Embedded as such in a minimal narrative, they are made disconcertingly concrete both by the film's visual qualities and by the very tactics of that distilled, reflexive and ironic narrative.

The abstract aspects, of course, are not separate from but develop out of the way Siegel has shaped, refined, virtually idealised his material. Where the interplay of genre and treatment, action and context, realistic pretence and idealising practice have previously resulted in the contrariness of his films, here they stand as full-blown contradictions. What most films do is comfortably (and unthinkingly) to accommodate one to the other; what Siegel has often done in the past is to accomplish this as a specific task (characters having to work their way out of streamlined genre structures). What *Escape from Alcatraz* has the confidence to do is to function simultaneously, but quite simply, as a quintessential escape story and a metaphorical representation of the same. By sedulously reducing, or playing down, his material in one area—characterisation, connecting incident, object lessons spelled out à la *Riot in Cell Block 11*—Siegel has realised unexpected potential in another.

One might indicate the split by noting that on this Rock there are two kinds of time and two kinds of space. The time which detectives Madigan and Coogan were up against, or which John Books in *The Shootist* counted out between swigs of laudanum—dramatic, establishing time, essential to the conviction of those films—plays little part in *Escape from Alcatraz*. An opening title, 'January 18, 1960, San Francisco', dates Frank Morris' arrival on the Rock and invokes the real-life origin of the story: the disappearance of three inmates (whether finally successful as an escape or not) which was instrumental in the closing of Alcatraz. The planning and execution of Morris' escape, however, is



'Riot in Cell Block 11': prison melodrama and a plea for penal reform

as given) the vagaries of production and directorial control in Hollywood. The fact, for example, that Siegel came by accident to what would seem to be two of his most typical films, *Madigan* and his first collaboration with Clint Eastwood, *Coogan's Bluff* ('Sometimes I have the feeling that I met Clint, and got the picture, because my name sounded like a combination of the man who had been the director, Alex Segal, and the man they were considering to replace him, Don Taylor\*'). One thing highlighted by Siegel's structural tightness and narrative leanness is a distinctly quirky sense of characterisation. What, in fact, is often claimed as his theme—the independent hero fighting his way free of some organisation—is nothing more than a description of the way his films work, behavioural detail taking on a life independent of the physical/emotional/psychological trap that is otherwise being constructed (q.v. Tony Rayns' review of

liberal reputation into that of a law-and-order diehard.

A related anomaly is his tendency to go for a certain kind of surface realism. Location shooting and natural lighting would seem to run counter to an elliptical, abstracting dramatic technique. But it might also be the tension between the two that creates the peculiar impact of Siegel's best films—a narrative steel trap closing on characters whose reality lies elsewhere—even if this documentary attention to setting is a further temptation to a too literal reading of his theme. The distinction between visual realism and dramatic stylisation ceases to be useful, anyway, at the point where they begin exchanging, or drawing on, each other's values.

Lighting which emphasises foreground shadow against bright backgrounds might seem unusually 'realistic' because it deviates from Hollywood orthodoxy. But in a chamber-piece like *The Shootist* it serves a stylising function, extending a sense of foreclosure (the hero is dying of cancer) from

\*Quoted from an interview with Stuart Kaminsky in *Take One* Vol. 3, No. 4.

literally timeless: the action could be taking days, weeks or years, as scenes in the cells (putting together a digging tool; chiselling out a ventilation grate; exploring the labyrinth of shafts behind) alternate with equally spare, functional scenes in the exercise yard (mainly to do with prison 'socialising': who sits where on the steps; the settling of grudges).

In terms of atmosphere, this is a reasonable and conventional enough way of describing prison's day-to-day sameness. Siegel's particular variation is the random selection of weather on view, an effect which again unites a vaguely realistic ambience (scenes were filmed in the actual yard at Alcatraz, in whatever conditions were prevailing, with the actors dressed and behaving accordingly) with an elliptical, abstracting technique (seasons may have passed in the transition from one such scene to another). One prisoner's comment on the weather almost illustrates the oddity of the effect: 'Summer's comin' on. It's getting colder. The weather here is as crazy as the Rock. Maybe crazier. Mark Twain once wrote that the coldest winter he ever spent was a summer in San Francisco...'

But in its second dimension, time—as it is understood in a maximum security prison like Alcatraz—is made unusually explicit. Richard Tuggle's admirably terse, epigrammatic script invokes it as a concept that is almost as concrete as the physical confinement. 'They don't want you doing anything here but time,' comments English (Paul Benjamin), kingpin of the black convicts, when Morris asks why books are taken to the convicts rather than their being allowed to visit the library. Later, English summarises the rationale of the Rock: 'One long count. We count the hours. The bulls count us. And the king bulls count the counts.'

The discussion/abstraction of this concept is complemented by what Siegel extracts from the physical environment. Again the double standard is that location shooting establishes an elementary reality (Alcatraz, closed since 1963, had to be reclaimed from salt-water erosion and the depredations of casual inhabitants), while the narrative compression denies the location any reality except as expressive detail. The scenes in the exercise yard, for instance, as well as being pointedly imagistic in their dialogue—the painter Doc (Roberts Blossom) explains why he has included a flower in his self-portrait: 'That's something inside me they can't lock up with their bars and walls'—have an allusive visual detachment. Siegel shoots not so that we will understand the geography of the place, or even to let us know what it feels like to be shut away, but to convey essential impressions: the convicts, identical in black pea-jackets and woollen caps, lounge casually but in strict pyramidal order; the harbour and San Francisco shoreline are imprinted tantalisingly behind every glimpse of the outside wall.

The metaphorical uses of space, finally, impose themselves on a narrative that is otherwise a stark, repetitive mechanism, posing problems, then solving them. When Morris finds that he doesn't have enough digging leverage with the nail clippers he has stolen from the Warden, he welds on a spoon handle, using a coin as solder; needing a drill to open the ventilation hatch that will take

them on to the roof, the escapees improvise one out of an electric fan. But the punctuating shots of the island within the harbour do not point outwards, towards a social context, but inwards, towards a duplication of enclosures. The prison as a collection of individual, self-contained prisons, one man to a cell, is far from the picture of democracy violently in the making in *Riot in Cell Block 11*. The clutter of books, pictures and possessions in each cell suggests a hive of separate worlds, while it modestly qualifies English's chill formulation of time-serving as the only activity, and the Warden's equally crisp theory: 'If you disobey the rules of society, they send you to prison. If you disobey the rules of the prison, they send you to us... Alcatraz is a maximum security prison with very few privileges. We don't make good citizens. But we make good prisoners.' Once they have chiselled a way out of their cells, Morris and co. must negotiate another sequence of chambers in the inspection shaft before they make it to the roof and thence to the Bay.

Fascinatingly, this duplication extends even to the methods of the escapees. In order to conceal the holes they are digging through the backs of their cells, they manufacture dummy grilles out of papier mâché. And having reproduced their prison in token, as it were, they then reproduce themselves. Rather than the customary pillow under the blankets to cover their absence, they also construct dummy heads, complete with hair from the barber's shop. The final credits appear over a shot of the grinning facsimile that Morris has left behind, which effectively combines the notion that the duel between prisoners and warders has been very much a symbolic one with the enigma that is its only narrative result (since Morris is never found, dead or alive, after swimming out into the Bay, the 'head' is the only evidence that he was ever there).

Given so self-consciously shaped and rigorously refined a genre film, it is tempting to confer on Siegel a fourth reputation, to place him with those other Hollywood veterans whose old age produced works of limpid assurance and transcendental ease with the conventions of a lifetime. *Escape from Alcatraz* certainly has something of that careless courage: every image is a perfect picture of what the film is and what it is about; it sees no need for extraneous information that will make audiences feel more familiar with what it shows, nor for extraneous claims to its own significance on any other level. It is instructive, however, to resurrect *Riot in Cell Block 11* from one's memory of it as a crusading B-movie, with the powerhouse knack of converting prison melodrama into a plea for penal reform, and to place it alongside *Escape from Alcatraz*. The similarities, especially in formal terms, stand out as plainly as the differences, suggesting that Siegel may not so much have transformed himself as not been too well accounted for in the first place.

*Riot in Cell Block 11* opens with newsreel footage of riots in various U.S. prisons—on one level, a simple enough assurance of the 'truthfulness' of the fiction to follow. But what that footage actually contains is a rather less simple indication of some of the tensions that the film will explore in its approach to the subject. Over shots of havoc being wrought

in numerous institutions, a newscaster offers comments on '... Maddened convicts who destroyed everything they could lay their hands on'; at a conference on the riots, however, a spokesman talks of the 'short-sighted' policies of the institutions involved, and when asked if the public has any responsibility in the matter declares, 'In the final analysis, especially the public.' What is remarkable about *Riot in Cell Block 11*, and what it derives from this prologue, is not an overall 'documentary' fidelity to real events, but a contradiction of viewpoints, of representation: it confronts and confines visceral reportage/melodramatic exposé with sober organisational analysis. The contradiction is made explicit in one confrontation between Dunn (Neville Brand), the sympathetic Warden (Emile Meyer) and a corps of press men. The latter, Dunn accuses, are interested in the convicts only as sensational copy ('mad dogs... running wild') and are no more understanding of their demands for better conditions than the politicians. When a reporter asks why society should care what happens to the convicts, Dunn replies that it should, for in all senses it is footing the bill.

The interconnection, the identification of the world within and the world without, is insisted on didactically by the Warden, when he gives the newsmen a breakdown on the convicts involved in the riot ('We've got all kinds here, good and bad, just like on the outside') and when he recites the statistics, and the consequences, of the present system (90 per cent of the convicts will eventually be released; 65 per cent will return to prison). This perspective is the key to the way the film tries levelly to extend sympathy to the convicts, once it has absorbed its own element of 'sensational copy'—the initial break-out from block 11, with tilted angles as the convicts emerge from their cells, hungering to smash both building and guards. After Dunn seizes control of the loud-speaker system (which just previously had been broadcasting music and used-car commercials from the outside world) to insist on the need for discipline, the film becomes absorbed in problems of social organisation, ploughing emotional energy into tersely illustrative scenes.

The inside/outside tension is reinforced as the basis of the film's structure by the way Siegel deploys the subsequent action as if he were objectively studying tactical moves and counter-moves: the marshalling of the prison authorities as the inmates of block 11 take their guards hostage and consolidate their position; the escalation of the riot as other cell blocks break into the yard to loot supplies and obstruct the fire trucks; the final containment of the rebels by an advancing line of state police. (The resulting sense of detachment may be a measure of Siegel's success in exploitation terms: the audience is allowed to experience both the anarchistic exhilaration of the break-out and the inexorable orderliness with which it is held in check.) But while the action seems to be laying down absolute distinctions, the film otherwise is turning them inside out: 'If we could get across that anyone could land in prison—just like that,' declares one convict negotiator. Before they can 'democratically' present their demands to the authorities, the convicts must curb their unruly elements, repressing not only the bloodthirsty 'Mad'

Mike Carnie (Leo Gordon) but other social undesirables (evidently considered so by the film as well) such as homosexuals.

The linking of the film's dramatic structure to the general ironies of social organisation thrown up by prison life brings it at times close to the bleak mechanism of *Escape from Alcatraz*. What diffuses the earlier film is its explicit propagandising, the speech-making about prison conditions and earnest 'problem picture' approaches which occasionally emerge in the script. These in a way blunt the film's otherwise successful stylisation, suggesting that Siegel might be either picking out local detail in a generalised case history or restraining melodramatic excess by anchoring dramatic logic in well-rehearsed liberal arguments about prison reform.

The three-way clash between Dunn, Carnie and the 'Colonel' (Robert Osterloh), the ex-military man whose education makes him the convicts' natural spokesman despite his reluctance to commit himself, lends emotional resonance to the convicts' struggling cause, but it also sketches a universal problem of social co-operation (the Colonel, Dunn and Carnie representing head, heart and unbridled emotion?). Overall, one might note Siegel's purposeful shaping of even incidental scenes and characters and the often dispassionate, ritualising effect of his direction. The many occasions on which the Warden, press and politicians stride across the exercise yard to confront Dunn are always shown in long shot and never abbreviated with a cut—their impact only muffled by the gratuitous overlaid 'march' music.

The last shot of *Riot in Cell Block 11* returns to the beginning, a long view down the corridor of the block, with Dunn being returned to his cell after a final interview with the regretful Warden. The rioters' demands—for work programmes, for better designed cells, for psychiatric care for disturbed inmates—eventually accepted by the Warden and the Governor, have been repudiated by the state legislature. Some good will come of the publicity: Carnie will get such care, the Colonel will be paroled. But Dunn faces a thirty year sentence for instigating the riot. The realistic pessimism of this moment has been built into the fabric of *Escape from Alcatraz*, the inside/outside perspective now worked through the single image of cages within cages, the social dimension completely subsumed (but arguably not lost) in the absolute stylisation.

What remains the same is the no-waste precision with which characters and incident are tied into the central mechanism. In *Escape from Alcatraz*, there is even a perversity in this functionalism: the only convicts to receive visitors from the outside world, English and Charley Butts (Larry Hankin), and thus the only two provided with a direct motive for escape, either are not included or don't make the break. Morris' two fellow escapees, the Anglin brothers, simply appear in Alcatraz about halfway through, and thereafter are not characterised at all, except in what they contribute to the plan (one works in the barber's shop, one in the clothing store).

Such 'purity' makes it seem that one character, the Warden, is given to us in excessive detail. Neurotically punctilious in manner, he is played by Patrick McGoohan



'Escape from Alcatraz': figures in the landscape of the Rock

with a tetchiness, a nervousness that appears out of keeping with either his power or his function as the System's sadistic representative. But these 'decorative' aspects of his character are insinuated with subtle care: the clutter of symbols in his office (a model of the prison, fish in a tank, a bird in a cage) are not icons of power but adornments he has elected himself to express his role. They indicate the way he exercises his authority as arbitrary, unnecessary whims (suspending Doc's painting privileges, then going out of his way to needle Morris when Doc responds by chopping off his own fingers), and his essential function (as *agent provocateur*) in setting the escape into motion. A vital part here is played by one of the Warden's most trivial appurtenances, his nail clippers. Two pairs lie in his ashtray during his initial interview of Morris, who steals one of them for future use. The other is dropped accidentally by the Warden inside Doc's cell, which leads him to discover the portrait of himself that Doc has done. His evident amusement at the find (he begins to smile, echoing the faintly demented smile in the painting—indicating his pleased recognition of his own insanity?) in turn prompts, perversely but inevitably, his withdrawal of Doc's privileges, the latter's self-mutilation, and the initiation of the escape plan.

Outrage over Doc is never explicitly presented as the trigger that sets Morris in motion, although so much is suggested by the sequence of events and by a curious emblem which Doc passes to Morris. The chrysanthemum which Doc represents in his self-portrait he slips in reality into Morris' overalls just before destroying his painting hand, and another flower is found at the end on Angel Island by the Warden, even as he categorically declares that Morris and the Anglins must have drowned. A seemingly sentimental detail when discussed in isolation, the flower in context is of a piece with the abstraction of the rest, another decorative figure (for some undying hope of freedom), and as such perhaps another token of the Warden's will. The Warden thus becomes, in some unconscious, repressed

way, the instigator of the escape: having perfected his system to such a degree that he is left with little to do but toy with its symbols and, capriciously, his subjects, he needs to provoke an active challenge. And Morris, the nominal hero, becomes strangely passive, a function also of the system to the point that he must be goaded into a response.

This is intimated by the early scenes of prison processing and discipline, which Morris accepts with scarcely a murmur, let alone the defiance of Dunn or of a string of Siegel heroes defined by their independence and self-assertion. Where Dunn's intelligence is presented as an admirable quality in any other context, Morris' is merely an annotation on the background data perused by the Warden, the detail which perhaps prompts him to elect Morris as his opponent in his real-life chess game. What keeps Morris' heroism alive through this is, simply, the fact that he is played by Clint Eastwood.

Siegel's development since the late 60s, in fact, might almost be charted through his working relationship with Eastwood. The actor arrived, *macho* and persona intact, as it were, from the Italian Westerns, but has increasingly gone 'underground' through his films with Siegel. The tension between the actor's assumed omni-competence and situations in which his characters are more acted upon than acting might be taken as a metaphor for the way Siegel has buried (or compressed) his meaning beneath crystalline action surfaces. In *Coogan's Bluff*, that tension is simply a schematic adjustment of the tough-guy image with a last-minute absolution of 'human pity'; in *The Beguiled*, it becomes the subject, as the incapacitated hero is turned into a pawn in the psycho-sexual games; in *Dirty Harry*, it provocatively projects an uncompromising hard-nosed cop as social, sexual and even religious martyr. *Escape from Alcatraz* presents the hero and the system which he fights as aspects of one another: it is unclear whether he has worked the puzzle out to a successful conclusion or whether the puzzle (the system/the metaphorical game of prisons) has successfully worked itself out through him.



# GEORGE HOELLERING

1898–1980

Dilys Powell

George Hoellering, who ran London's Academy Cinema for 36 years, was as important to the screen in this country as any of the great film directors. Without him we might not have seen the work of a good many of those great film directors.

He was himself a gifted director. Long before we in London knew him, we knew of his work. In the 1930s there were few serious guides to the international screen, but there was Paul Rotha's *The Film Till Now*; some of us were brought up on it—and there was the name of George Hoellering. He had worked with Dudow and Brecht on *Kuhle Wampe*. He had directed a Hungarian film, *Hortobagy*; it was, Rotha said, pictorially superb. Reading, I added *Hortobagy* to my list of films I had to see. A good many years were to pass before I had the chance of watching it. This devoted story of the herdsmen and the horses of the Hungarian plain had alarmed the censorship; the birth of the foal shown in the film had, apparently, been thought unsuitable for presentation to the British public—that and, perhaps, the general air of fecundity.

By the time we saw *Hortobagy*, George Hoellering was established at the Academy Cinema. His career had been varied. Born in Austria in 1898, at the outbreak of the First War he had enlisted, claiming to be eighteen when in fact he was no more than sixteen years old. He had commanded a detachment at the funeral of Franz Joseph. Possibly it was his experiences as an officer that fostered the feeling for horses which one finds in

*Hortobagy*. In the early 1930s he was working in the German cinema. *Kuhle Wampe* appeared in 1932; a year later Hitler came to power. George returned to Austria, then moved to Hungary where work on *Hortobagy* occupied him in 1934 and 1935. Hungary, however, was turning towards the Nazi creed, and finally he came to England.

The Academy Cinema was then run by Elsie Cohen; in 1937 George, joining her, became a director. But again his life was to be disrupted. War broke out, and in 1940 he was interned. The story goes that in one department at any rate he made the best of it; he took over the catering, and his group ate well. By the time he was released the Academy Cinema had been bombed and all was to do again.

On coming to England he had planned to resume film-making. He had been preparing a narrative piece about a factory worker and his girl. It was to be called *One Out of Millions*, and Muriel Pavlow, then an unknown actress, was to be the star. Preparations were well advanced, but war put a stop to the project. When he was released from internment he made some short films for the Ministry of Information. A decade later—it was in 1951—he produced and directed a version of T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*; Eliot collaborated and spoke the part of the Fourth Tempter. The film depended on the delivery of its text rather than on pictorial or dramatic qualities. Nevertheless at the Venice Festival it won

prizes for Best Art Direction and Best Film in Costume. In Britain, however, it was received with respect but a certain lack of enthusiasm. He made no more films. The rest of his life George devoted to the Academy Cinema, where in 1944 he became managing director; and for his work there one cannot be too grateful.

The Academy reopened in March 1944 with a Duvivier film. George was now in full control. The war was not over and it was difficult to secure suitable films. A few French movies were found, and a documentary-style piece written by Steinbeck, *The Forgotten Village*; presently to my delight *Hortobagy* was shown. It was some time before the influence of a man with deep knowledge of the cinema, individual tastes and powerful aesthetic judgment could be felt. But the Academy was to become unique. After the war there would be an increase in the number of London's specialised cinemas; none of them held as steady on course as the Academy. As time went by the theatre established an aesthetic identity. It was not only that you could be sure of finding there a film which, whether or not you liked it, was worth your while.

Difficult to define the qualities of an Academy programme. One might admire a film at a continental festival; one might even recommend it. George would demur. Not for the Academy, he would say; and later one would see that he was right. The influence grew clear. Unerringly George would bring back from the continent works which to another exhibitor, another distributor, might seem obscure, lacking in what I will call the stir of accepted cinema. He would persevere. If one film failed to excite the Academy audience—and there was a loyal Academy audience—he would trust his own judgment and bring in a second, even a third work by the same director. He formed public taste. He

'Hortobagy'



brought in films by Ingmar Bergman—and with *The Seventh Seal* he had a success. He brought in the early Satyajit Ray. He wanted the great opening trilogy in its chronological order. But though he had the second piece, *The Unvanquished*, in his hands, another exhibitor had acquired *Pather Panchali*—and then lost heart, or at any rate failed to show this lovely film. George negotiated, and was at last able to present the whole trilogy in its right order.

And he helped the public to understand foreign cinema. When I first saw Miklós Jancsó's *The Round-Up*—it was in Budapest with an interpreter muttering a translation into my ear—I failed to appreciate it. Frankly, I failed to understand it. George added a foreword which made the film clear to a British audience, and the public crowded in. He could be daring; it took nerve in 1967 to show *Ulysses*. He was a brilliant editor. He could persuade a director to allow his film to be re-edited or even cut. Carl Dreyer, surely the most obstinate of creative film-makers, was persuaded with *Day of Wrath*. Film-makers trained in continental government schools may be taught to direct but not to edit. When Milos Forman was here with his early *Peter and Pavla*, George was not happy with the film's editing. But Forman's permit to stay in England was running out; there was no time to do the job. George went to the Czechoslovak Embassy and got the permit extended.

The Academy's films, then, prospered and enlightened: films which without George's help might have withered in public indifference. They ranged widely: from the work of the Poles, from Polanski with *Knife in the Water* to Munk with *The Passenger*, to America's Rafelson and the dazzling *The King of Marvin Gardens*. And to Miklós Jancsó: not an easy director, but George, having won the British over with *The Round-Up*, showed nearly all the idiosyncratic and, as I think, beautiful Jancsó films. I remember the first public performance of *The Confrontation*. I was lucky enough to be in Budapest with George and his stepson, friend and collaborator, Ivo Jarosy; they had made the trip from London especially for the occasion.

But it was not only the creators of cinema who were indebted to George Hoellering. When Arnot Robertson, then reviewing films for the BBC, ran into trouble with one of the big American companies, a benefit performance was given at the Academy to help her with her legal costs. With a critic George was always ready to discuss—but he never resented. When I failed to grasp the significance of some technical achievement in the cinema he reproached me, but in friendship. And it is as a friend that I shall remember him. George greeting me at a Press show; George taking a morning off on the beach at the Venice Festival, swimming his tireless breast stroke and urging me to emulate him; George watching Jancsó directing some outdoor fragment and resolutely standing for hours up to his knees in the snow. I think he was a happy man, happy at the Academy, happy in his Norfolk retreat with his wife Anne. 'I thought,' Ivo Jarosy said sadly to me, 'I thought he would live for ever.' So did I, so did I. ■

George Hoellering was a governor of the BFI from 1967 to 1971.

# Film Reviews



'Mirror'

## Mirror

'We wanted to make a simple film,' Andrei Tarkovsky said of *Mirror* (Artificial Eye), 'which would signify only what was shown. There are no episodes to decipher like symbols; there is nothing coded.' Judging from the reaction of the Moscow authorities (quoted in Herbert Marshall's article on the film in *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Spring 1976), *Mirror* appeared anything but simple by official Soviet standards. Obscurity was wished upon it and, condemned as thematically 'inaccessible' to general audiences, it was rendered actually so by the ignominy of a '3rd Category' release in Russia. After a six-year struggle to get it seen in the West, *Mirror* consequently appears in Britain almost in the guise of ideological refugee; that a director of Tarkovsky's stature should be so disregarded by his own countrymen is calculated to bristle us all with the determination to find in his work a lucid and unarguable triumph. And if Tarkovsky calls it simple, that's what it has to be.

In fact, to be thoroughly difficult, the film is as clear as its title. Its reflections, according to what one sets before them, are both personal and public. Look into them, and a perspective comes into view that is at once immediate and elusive. Retreat from them, and the film makes no demands in its reminiscence; it is as 'open' as any other memoir, and what is familiar to Tarkovsky can be as familiar to us, given time. But his mirror, in all conscience, is not your average piece of cinematic décor, and the doors that can be glimpsed opening and closing within it have the need for several keys. While we may begin to understand the architecture of Tarkovsky's mansion through the recollections of Roublev, *Solaris* and (dimly) *Ivan's Childhood*, the labyrinthine grace of *Mirror* requires a

ground-plan that can only be lightly sketched at first encounter.

It opens with an episode which is simple enough once one has established that Tarkovsky himself regards it as metaphorical—the effort made by an awkward adolescent to overcome his speech impediment. His breakthrough gets the film on the move (it signifies that the director has been able to force himself to communicate) but it's a difficult beginning, perhaps too much so in that the struggling youth is never seen again and Tarkovsky's stunningly articulate incoherence finds other forms of expression throughout the rest of the piece. An early draft of *Mirror* apparently began with what is now its penultimate scene; a man dying of what his doctor terms a self-induced sickness embarks on the 'confession' that is Tarkovsky's theme. 'He is in the state of a man who is living his final moments, without time to explain to others. He only wishes that peace be made with him... (and) he recollects at that precise moment the episodes in the film.' It could have been a reassuringly normal start—except that the narrative flow of *Mirror* owes nothing to the conventional, its mood is not one of reassurance, and in any case Tarkovsky 'didn't want to complicate the form still further.'

As it stands, the film plunges straight to the heart of its subject with the first of many scenes of the narrator's mother (sometimes played, with appealing intensity, by Margarita Terekhova, sometimes by Tarkovsky's real mother, L. Tarkovskaya, who has serenely walked away with the film by its close) waiting for her husband to come home. Balanced on a ramshackle fence, the girl gazes across a summer field while the camera, gliding behind her, suddenly discloses a distant figure as if she had planted him there herself in the



Sean Connery in 'Cuba'

tall grass and were now watching him come to life. He is not the awaited father, but briefly seems to take his place. Wry, clumsy, and—like many Tarkovsky wayfarers—apparently worn down by the dull weight of his own existence, he attempts an uneasy friendship only to retreat across the field once more when Marusya, unimpressed, likens him to a deranged character from Chekhov. As he pauses in the distance, a squall of wind rolls past him over the grass like a tidal wave.

The fascination of this scene, and it is quite hypnotic, illustrates that what constitutes simplicity for Tarkovsky would be a three-act melodrama in other hands. The following camerawork (identical to that of *Solaris*, although a different cameraman is credited), the tangential conversation with its multiple resonances, the abrupt changes in mood—a creaking hammock under the pines, the collapsing fence that drops man and girl to the ground—and the final tableau with its ominous and disconcerting beauty, convey so many implications that one can only note their passing and hope to sort them out when all the evidence has been given. Most notably, although the visitor (played by Anatoli Solonitsin, who was Roublev and featured in *Solaris*) doesn't reappear, his spectre haunts the film's later recollections and his philosophy is like a diagnosis: 'We're always running around, fussing about, talking trivialities, and it's because we don't trust in nature, in what's inside us.' He seems to typify the succession of men incapable, for sheer complacency, of proving tolerable partners for Tarkovsky's women. But *Mirror* also turns out, perhaps with equal emphasis, to be concerned with that border between the pinewood (enclosing the house) and the turbulent open field beyond, and it's the contrast/conflict between the two terrains which provides the film's closing dialogue.

Landscapes, history and the recurring patterns of human lives—the themes of *Roublev* and *Solaris* are freshly illuminated by *Mirror*, in which (as at the end of *Solaris*) the security of the family home is recognised as an illusion by Tarkovsky even as he indulges it. Repeatedly, the sought for idyll turns to nightmare, battered by wind, fire and rain; water, making its own mirrors, flows down the walls, sudden gusts hurl table decorations to the floor, and flames either engulf, terrifyingly, the cabin next door, or flicker feebly into darkness. While the past is obsessively reactivated in the hope that somehow it can amend the present, the elements have no truce to offer. It's as though the emotional forces that split parents and children alike are elemental too, the family crises an inescapable part of the changing seasons.

'Halfway through my earthly life,' says Tarkovsky's father, who reads his own poems on the film's soundtrack, 'I lost myself in a gloomy forest.' As the final shot of the film indicates, Tarkovsky sees himself in the same predicament. He uses the poems superbly as a bridge between the generations, celebrating mother and wife (interchangeable, as they were in *Solaris*), recalling yet another, more distant childhood, and proudly asserting continuity ('the table is the same for great-grandfather and grandson'). He creates similar bridges in his historical references—the tragic shots of children being separated from their parents at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, the majestic balloon flights that promise the start of the new life in Russia, the growing unease of the confrontations on the Sino-Russian border. The international events are part of the lives of himself and his family, as if each affected the other; he recalls his mother's frantic visit to the printing works where a mistake in her proof-reading during the Stalinist era could have cost the staff their jobs, and he shows the anguished farewells as his father went off to war, the memories shuffled and fragmentary like discoloured snapshots.

So the film is personal, unpredictable, even capricious, but never impenetrable, although an obscure bit of business in which a bird alights on a boy's hat could do with some deciphering (fantasy? memory?), and the dreams of the infant Tarkovsky (his mother floating in mid-air, or dancing round the room while the ceiling collapses) are strikingly vivid. 'We have a debt,' Tarkovsky once said, 'to those who have given us life and love: we must tell them of our love.' Now that the debt has been so handsomely paid, perhaps he will be able to emerge once more from the pinewoods, though advance reports of his new film, *Stalkers*, might suggest the forest is still around him.

PHILIP STRICK

## Cuba and The Human Factor

The greyish hero—civil servant and double agent—of Graham Greene's *The Human Factor* finds himself most painfully alone at the moment when he has come upon his most important secret. He wanders by chance into a suburban sanctuary, 'a hideous church so new it might have been constructed overnight with the glittering bricks of a build-it-yourself kit.' The need to confess something to somebody overwhelms him, and an absurd colloquy follows in which the priest,

impatiently fingering his rosary, finally advises him to see a doctor. This scene, an admittedly small way station on the hero's inadvertent journey to the other side (politically speaking), has not been included in Tom Stoppard's scrupulously faithful rendition of the book for Otto Preminger's film. But because it is the novel's only reference to religion, one is tempted to read the scene as a more significant reflection on both character and author. The guilty, all but suppressed impulse that draws Maurice Castle into the church seems akin to the sense of gratitude, rather than political belief, that has led him to become a minor cog in the espionage machine. Similarly, one senses Greene as half-heartedly going through the motions of belief (political and religious) which turn into equally half-hearted gestures of dismissal.

*The Human Factor* is a dry and rather tired book—its resignation emerging as defiant retreat into a self-sufficient literary world, marked by a strange kind of anachronism, not so much in its detailed descriptions of the neighbourhoods of St. James and Soho as in the way characters relate to these places. The dryness of Preminger's film is of a different order: his renowned objectivity is no more ruffled by the aesthetic quaintness than the moral dubiousness of what is going on. Richard Lester's *Cuba*, on the other hand, gives us the spiritual and emotional malaise of later Greene in fuller measure. One might find parallels with its characters as far back as *Our Man in Havana*, but in many ways it catches more of *The Comedians* than the film that was made from that book.

The three Westerners in *Cuba* (United Artists), caught in the middle of the revolution that overthrows Batista at the end of 1959, are not as all-embracingly labelled as Greene's Brown, Smith and Jones. The film-makers, however, are as divided as Greene between their gestures of solidarity with the revolution and their sentimental attachment to these defeated, non-committed interlopers. By the time of *The Human Factor*, Greene's formulation of the spiritual necessity and emotional difficulty of belief has turned into a receding disillusionment, wilfully self-enclosed. *Cuba*, arguably, explores the bind much more vigorously. It declares its split personality by explicitly acknowledging the conventions of romantic fiction (*The Maltese Falcon*, *Casablanca*, etc.) in the midst of its historical recreation. Consistently, Lester and scenarist Charles Wood develop the situation as an ironic (not to say dialectical) fusion of the two, and end with one banishing the other (the Fidelistas enter Havana as hero and heroine go through an airport renunciation scene).

After the more languorous *Robin and Marian* and *Butch and Sundance*, *Cuba* marks a return to pointillist form for Lester—and, in collaboration again with Wood, one might expect a return also to the polemics of *How I Won the War*. But for all its piecemeal tactics, *Cuba* has a remarkably integrated, undidactic dramatic shape. The flight into Havana of Robert Dapes (Sean Connery), an ex-major in the British Army about to become security adviser to Batista's failing régime, and Gutman (Jack Weston), a down-at-heel American businessman looking for a quick kill, is intercut with various scenes on the ground. Alexandra Pulido (Brooke Adams) and her playboy husband Juan (Chris Sarandon) are entertained at the poolside of Batista's right-hand man General Bello (Martin Balsam); Juan's father, patriarch of tobacco and rum industries to which Juan has proved himself an inattentive heir, presides over a baptism in the cane fields; the brother, Julio (Danny De La Paz), of Juan's mistress, Therese, escapes from government troops and makes his way home, where he declares his next revolutionary act will be to kill his sister's 'pimp'. Almost before the credits are over, the film has introduced most of its characters, and laid the ground for a plot that will be developed as a series of formal parallels and symmetries.

There only remains, to complete the Greenian triumvirate with Dapes and Gutman, seedy British entrepreneur Skinner (Denholm Elliott), who plays golf with the establishment ('Your bash, vicar') and

runs guns to the rebels. Bracketing these intertwined *dramatis personae*, as typical Lester clowns and indices to the state of the nation, are two American accountants—who arrive handcuffed to their briefcases, tactfully explain to Batista their country's ambivalent policy on Cuba, and then proceed to ignore the revolution while they struggle to balance the régime's books—and a moustachioed policeman, forever on the lookout for his share of the graft that seems to be Cuba's way of life, and who is first given the brush-off by Dapes and later a wad of Monopoly money.

Lester skilfully equates such sideline business with political detail. The skein of collisions, intrusions and asides determines the film's dramatic as well as its comic structure. It indicates the wilfully artificial nature of the romantic fiction and historical recreation—and the characters' compromised function within them. Julio, the rebel gunman, shooting at Juan Pulido in a bar, instead kills the manager of a visiting striptease artiste from Hollywood (Julio and his sister live in a tenement called the Hollywood Hotel). Later, shooting at Dapes, Julio instead kills his adjutant, just after Dapes has protested how he handled counter-insurgency differently in Malaya. A track away from Dapes (the most pointed camera movement in the film) subsequently emphasises his isolation, and distances the film from his stance as the honourable soldier of fortune ('Soldiering has changed... it's not as clean as it was') which previously it has seemed to accept. Lester's dialectics strike a more Eisensteinian note when he cuts from a soldier severing the ear of a dead Fidelista to Alexandra putting on earrings before a night out.

'I wanted to make a political film within which no one spoke about politics and a love story where no one spoke of love,' was Lester's own statement of purpose. *Cuba* certainly achieves its considerable effect by indirection, and by subtly playing off its diverse elements. At times, it seems to be trying too hard to push these subjects as matters of discussion off the screen: the stills montage that recapitulates the past affair between Dapes and Alexandra (as they are about to resume it) is a stilted device, and the actual portrayal of the rebels throughout smacks of an uneasy revolutionary romanticism. The film is on surer ground when confronting the 'establishment' romanticism of its main characters, encompassing their disillusionment and feeding it back via such fictions as *Casablanca* and *The Maltese Falcon* (the names of Gutman and the stripper, Miss Wonderly). The most unsettling of these allusions occurs when Julio, having been thrown out by the revolutionaries, finally tracks down Juan, his sister's defiler, now abandoned in the exodus from Havana to solitary enjoyment of his swimming pool, and shoots him in imitation of the famous 'deflected' slaying in *The Great Gatsby*.

*The Human Factor* (Rank) might also be said to have achieved a measure of distance from Greene's moral defeatism and literary old-fashionedness. Not so much by putting it in context as by refusing to acknowledge it—an effect as interesting even if it seems rather inadvertent. By taking the novel 'straight', Stoppard and Preminger have preserved all the fascinating ritual of this particular branch of government bureaucracy, but have lost the book's 'haunted' quality. Maurice Castle, committed neither to his routine job in a sub-section of the Secret Service nor to the dutiful spying he conducts out of gratitude, seems to be forever in suspense, waiting to be discovered and pushed in one committed direction or the other. The novel invokes questions of national loyalty and treason, but they function rather perfunctorily as an ironic backdrop, as very shabby conceits compared to the one genuine attachment Castle has formed—to his wife Sarah and her son by another man, both black and both rescued from the South African security police by a friend who happened to be a Communist. Greene's dedication from Conrad—'I only know that he who forms a tie is lost. The germ of corruption has entered into his soul'—indicates that Castle is already one of that corrupt elect, unable to find peace on either side of the political fence.

It follows that the novel is most sharply focused when dealing with Castle's predicament in isolation. The film, conversely, is most effective when it insists on seeing Castle as part of the pattern, part of the game of espionage which he conducts with more anguish than his opportunist colleagues. (The corporate villainy of the latter proves ample grist to the mill of Preminger's predilection for long unbroken takes and dialogue exchanges.) Part of this effect is that, in both scripting and casting, the old Castle has been somewhat submerged. Stoppard's screenplay tends to give Castle the same kind of semi-punning, wryly distanced dialogue as his morally more dubious confrères (his opening line, '169 came back mutilated—nasty', coyly withholds the information that he is talking about a cable). And Nicol Williamson's performance suggests levels of irony incongruously buried in this timorous civil servant who admits that his life's dream is security. When, for instance, Castle spoils a little joke made by his superior (John Gielgud), it is hard now to determine whether it is done out of simple ignorance (Castle, we are told, is unimaginative and dullish) or a secret malice.

But what emerges from this pattern is a new kind of structural unity. The sentimental crunch of the novel is probably the killing of Castle's assistant Davis, whom the department's overlords assume must be the mole in their midst because of his bachelor's high living style. But the film tends to stress rather the identity of interests between the displaced Castle and the lonely, out-of-his-depth security officer Daintry (Richard Attenborough). It is hard to remember, for instance, if it was as significant in the novel that Daintry's marriage and Castle's loyalty to the 'firm' both dissolved seven years ago. The kinship, rather than Daintry's dawning realisation that the department has killed the wrong man, is what emerges from the film's best judged scene, when Daintry embarrassedly confronts Castle in his Berkhamsted home. The scenes between Castle and his wife, by comparison, have little depth of feeling (partly due to the limitations of the actress Iman), and the 'germ of corruption' is thus poorly represented. Similarly, the film rather falls apart at the end, when Castle is definitively on his own—though the widely reported financial troubles which the film suffered may be to blame for the fact that his Moscow exile (a chilly apartment with the inevitable Kremlin turrets visible through the window) has to be largely taken on faith.

RICHARD COMBS

## Messidor

'I want to...start not from the text but from something much more material...the roadside, cafés, countryside': Alain Tanner talking about his new film in an interview in *SIGHT AND SOUND* (Winter 1978/79). There, Tanner explicitly terms the project 'the reverse of *Jonah*', and certainly after the didactic formalism of that film, *Messidor* (Gala) springs a free-wheeling surprise.

The situation—one can hardly say plot—is simple enough, evidently deriving remotely from a French news story. Two girls in their late teens meet hitch-hiking out of Lausanne. Jeanne is an undergraduate seeking a few days' respite from books and boy friend, Marie a shop assistant who has lost her return rail ticket after a visit to her mother. On impulse, they extend the trip beyond Marie's return home, carrying on even despite the intrusion of violence in the shape of a rape attempt on Jeanne, thwarted only when Marie bashes the attacker with a stone. Their limited funds run out; equipped by chance with a pistol stolen from the glove box of a motorist who has picked them up, they eventually use it for a grocery store hold-up. Soon their pictures are on television and they are on the run, but it is some time before they are arrested. When this happens, on the strength of a tip-off to the police after they are recognised in a café, violence flares again, meaninglessly since the man they shoot dead as the supposed informer is in fact a harmless bystander.

In a broad sense, then, the film is a chase thriller, and one can even detect, in the use of the dislocating everyday accident of Marie's lost ticket, an overtone of Hitchcock (perhaps it is just the chance correspondence of the station platform setting that brings the start of *Marnie* to mind). But what, more essentially, Tanner has wrought from this material is, in the fullest meaning of the term, a road movie. Again and again, the superlative camerawork of Renato Berta puts the spectator not in the driving seat but rather in the back seat—a position which quintessentially combines freedom and helplessness—as the Swiss highways unroll ahead: Tanner has said that the action moves 'all over Switzerland' and it is easy to believe him.

In the same way that the girls' chequered and sometimes quarrelsome itinerary is apparently a random one—Marie once claims that they are almost back where they started—so is the trajectory of the film itself. Although it might be argued that the tempo falters in the latter stages, this would be a mistaken objection: what Tanner

'The Human Factor': Nicol Williamson, Richard Attenborough, Adrienne Corri



has achieved is a structure that reproduces his protagonists' at once aimless and obsessive progress. For the terms in which Jeanne proposes the venture are those of 'playing a game' and the action could almost be said to resemble a macabre version of hide-and-seek. To quote Tanner again: 'The girls have no theory about what they are doing. They are not rebels.'

But if the magnetism of the movie's visual surface derives from the skill with which it lures one into the haphazardly a-social ambit of its heroines (uncannily embodied by two unfamiliar actresses, Clémentine Amouroux and Catherine Rétoré), there is a deeper manner in which the stray chain of events is linked by implicit social commentary, and in which the film provides that very theory which Jeanne and Marie eschew—not, to be sure, to 'explain' their actions, but to illuminate our responses.

The jagged swathe cut by the girls' progress, in fact, throws into relief the complacency of the society through which they are passing. This is a world overwhelmingly characterised by a consumerist scheme of things, in which, for instance, requests to café proprietors to work for food or to claim some left-overs are met less with anger than with simple incomprehension. The observation is all the sharper for being frequently so offhandedly humorous, as in the absurd vignette in which two elderly picnickers, seated at a municipally provided table at the very edge of a busy arterial road, respond in blank bewilderment to Jeanne's request, delivered in several languages, for them to spare a piece of bread; or in the superciliously silent refusal of the dapper man from whom Jeanne seeks a light for the half-smoked cigarette she has retrieved from the pavement. In one of the film's wittiest effects, a motorist who counters the hitch-hikers' requests for a loan with a pompously sub-Polonus discourse on the evils of borrowing and lending is seen only in over-the-shoulder shots from their vantage point, identifying him completely with the Mercedes emblem which, jutting from the bonnet of his gleaming car, dominates the centre of the frame.

The alienation which is the obverse of this affluence is expressed specifically through recurring images of traffic, not just of cars and trucks, but of trains and of jet planes roaring overhead: to subtly emblematic effect, when Marie first tests the stolen pistol, the noise of the shot is drowned by that of an aircraft. Even in the countryside, a funicular railway trundles up and down a hillside. Indeed, when the action ranges into rural settings, the film

expressly denies any romantic associations—the rape attempt takes place in the country and the farmer who orders the sheltering girls out of his cowshed is among the least sympathetic subsidiary characters. This fact perhaps lends a doubly ironic ring to the film's title, since Messidor (which, early on, is the phoney surname Jeanne gives to an inquisitive policeman) was the harvest month in the calendar of the French Revolution. Nor do the mountains provide more than an illusory zone of escape: from an elaborately composed shot of his heroines atop the peak they have climbed in a spirit of mystic endeavour, Tanner cuts directly to show them slumped dejectedly at the side of yet another urban freeway.

This is not the first time that the mountains have appeared: the introductory credit sequence comprises a miniature travelogue as a succession of majestic aerial shots sweep over the Swiss meadowlands, cityscapes, Alps, wrapping them into a collective entity through the accompaniment—and somehow the effect is not facile—of a Schubert song on the soundtrack. The subtext of the film is, of course, the state of Switzerland itself, and in a recurring figure of style the camera moves aside from the protagonists to survey their surroundings.

At the conclusion, after the squalidly meaningless shooting, Tanner holds his camera on the road after the ambulance and police car have driven away. But now the view is from ground level and there is no Schubert, only the noise of passing vehicles. Perhaps, though, the sense of regret which the movie summons up is best encapsulated in a rather earlier image, created when, as a shower begins, the camera registers the play of rain on the surface of a lake. No matter how fortuitously, one thinks of a corresponding effect in *Une Partie de Campagne*. No matter how dissimilar the films may be in other respects, they both combine a dimension of elegy and a startling sense of felt life.

TIM PULLEINE

## Black Jack

If distance lends enchantment, hindsight can make a meal of history. Period fiction, especially, needs a certain imaginative licence if it is not to be a mere recitation of historical half-truths. Naturalism, in other words, is not enough. It may lend a veneer of authenticity to a period drama; or it may, by refusing the compromise with conventional period

style, sound echoes of another time and place. But if you have a story to tell it can be more hindrance than help: the fictional impulse has too long a pedigree to be denied its traditions of form. *Black Jack* (Enterprise) does have a story to tell, but loses it in a thicket of naturalistic detail. What it gains on its periphery, it loses at its centre: pace, definition, the invitation to identify with its characters.

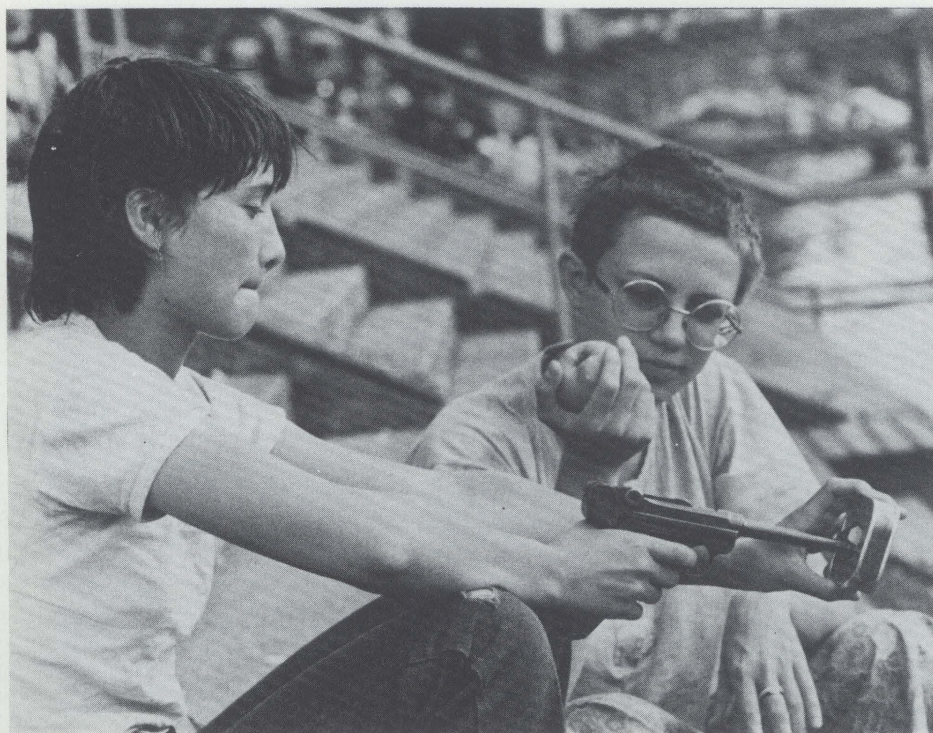
Naturalism is of course Ken Loach's stylistic signature. He works through improvisation, sketching the outline of a story and encouraging his actors to embellish it on impulse. This approach can sometimes be revelatory, pointing up the unnecessary rigidities of a system of tightly scripted, conventionally characterised drama. It has worked especially well in Loach's films for television (compare the treatment of the General Strike in *Upstairs, Downstairs* with Loach's version in *Days of Hope*). But *Black Jack* is a children's story, adapted from a novel by Leon Garfield about a young apprentice in mid-eighteenth century Yorkshire who rescues a girl from the madhouse. Granted that the original is picaresque, Loach's studiously unhurried adaptation seems almost perversely directionless. So much care has been taken to get the look and feel of the period that the narrative appears incidental to its setting.

*Black Jack* (Jean Franval) is, or ought to be, the story's pivot. A French sailor who survives the hangman's rope, he rises from his coffin and escapes into the countryside with the boy, Tolly (Stephen Hirst), who has been left to guard his 'corpse'. A lumbering, growling giant, *Black Jack* dominates these early scenes, only to disappear into the mist when the focus shifts to Tolly and his efforts to save young Belle (Louise Cooper) from the clutches of the doctor and the parson who want to incarcerate her in their grim asylum. *Black Jack* reappears as a major character towards the end, following an unexplained change of heart when he decides to help Tolly rescue Belle from her villainous captors. Meanwhile and again meanwhile, there have been so many casual shifts of scene, so many secondary characters bobbing about the fields and forests, that only a rare child unconditioned by the snap, crackle and pop of the television series will know where to look next. Children can unravel a knot (as witness the success of a hunt-the-thimble book like *Masquerade*), but surely can't be expected to pause for long reflection on the social conditions of pre-industrial northern England.

But this is what *Black Jack* asks them to do. Tolly and the Frenchman join a travelling fair, and Chris Menges' camera dwells long and lovingly on the 'characters' (an Irish quack and his miracle-working elixir, a troupe of dwarfs) and their caravans and camp-sites, picking out the detail with the punctiliousness of a contemporary landscape painter. The artist recalled by the town scenes is Hogarth, a nice contrast and one which is justified by the script in the idea that Belle's 'madness' is a condition of darkness and oppression and is lifted by the country air and the freedom of the road. In lingering on this circumstantial detail, Loach clearly aims not simply to evoke the past but to build in a commentary and a contrast ('I wanted,' he says, 'to get right away from the usual clichés of historical films, to get somewhere near the truth of those lives'). He shows, for instance, that travel in those days was long and arduous; but by stressing it, makes his point the same.

Adults may register this 'political' gloss. Children (and as Carroll knew, that includes adults) prefer to revel in the unreal. The film's way with dialogue pointedly illustrates the dilemma for someone trying honestly to represent history while trying also to tell a story. The actors' stumbling delivery, in a variety of dialects and a language which makes no concessions to period, merely replaces one kind of stiltedness (Gainsborough romance) with another, prompting the question why these costumed actors should be speaking modern Yorkshire. It is a too frequent misapprehension that stylised language must sound quaint. And this tale needs a stronger speech: understatement suggests under-rehearsal, the

'Messidor': Clémentine Amouroux, Catherine Rétoré



actors looking more embarrassed by improvised colloquialism than they might have been with a written text.

*Black Jack* was made on a very small budget in difficult circumstances. It is Ken Loach's first film for the cinema since *Family Life*, nearly ten years ago. That, rather than this film's faults, is the real cause for regret.

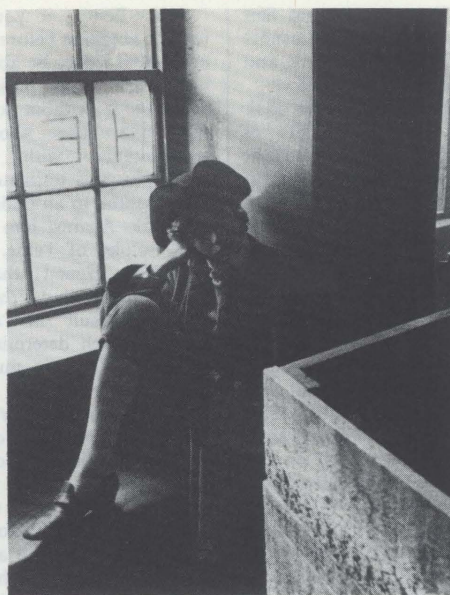
DAVID WILSON

## "10"

Gloom, all the more dispiriting for its shapelessness, envelops George Webber, playwright, composer and winner of five Academy Awards, when on his 42nd birthday Sam, his steady girl, throws a surprise party. 'After 40,' George's colleague Hugh tipsily declares, 'it's all patch, patch, patch.' The first irony of "10" (Columbia-EMI-Warner) is, of course, that this being Beverly Hills, 1979, there are few signs of patching: men grow greyer, or more portly, but for the most part they look and behave as though mortality has no place among the orange groves.

Blake Edwards, the film's writer and director, gently lowers his audience into the warm bath of Hollywood mores. Recklessly driving in pursuit of Jenny, a young woman who looks to him as though she would never—ever—need patching, George (Dudley Moore) crashes his cream-coloured Rolls head-on into a police car. George, a twitchily abstracted Englishman, is dressed down, having failed to produce either licence or registration, with a wearisome, disquieting politeness. At another moment, on a visit to Jenny's father, a dentist, George surrenders to the surgeon's similarly languid orders, in hopes of discovering his daughter's whereabouts, and allows six of his teeth to be filled. Had he been a true Californian, he would not, one imagines, have countenanced their decay.

Part of George's middle-aged gloom stems from the fact that, although he has profited from the money-spinning opportunities of California, he remains out of step with the prevailing lifestyle. He disapproves of Hugh's hedonistic young beachboy companion; whereas Sam (Julie Andrews), a fellow-expatriate, is an eminently hard-working singer who has earned a reputation equal to his own. He feels, vaguely, that something is missing: at every opportunity he squints through the



Stephen Hirst in 'Black Jack'

telescope on his patio at the non-stop, flower-power orgy being held across the dip by his long-haired (fortyish) neighbour.

George—diminutive, un-chic and rather petulantly self-centred—falls for Jenny (Bo Derek), whom he classes 'an 11' (his normal rating of pretty girls being on a scale of 1 to 10), and after a spat with Sam and a series of misadventures departs to Mexico to find her. His gloom is not allayed by the seemingly hopeless prospect of separating the newly wed Jenny from her large, bronzed husband, whose character is summed up during the wedding by a brief shot of his moonlike gaze at the gung-ho minister.

One of life's natural bumblers (the part was originally to have been played by George Segal), George does achieve the feat—by magnanimously rescuing the badly sunburned husband, who has fallen asleep and drifted out to sea on a surfboard—and is rewarded with Jenny's freely offered favours. But he does not have to work for the fulfilment of his fantasies; she will sleep with anyone if it pleases her. Propriety gets the better of his emotions. Jenny is abandoned in *Playboy* pose on her bed, and

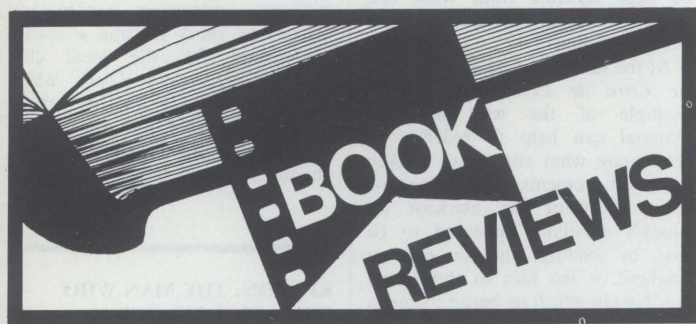
George returns to propose marriage to the mystified, restrained happy Sam.

Edwards tells his simple story—straightforward in both moral and narrative terms—with a beguiling professionalism: binding comic sequences are allowed to develop at a deceptively leisurely pace and then deftly ended before their natural conclusions. Matching ends and beginnings work with subliminal effect. 'I'd like to punch him in the face,' Sam tells Hugh, as they sit on the beach discussing the errant George. A Mexican brass band rouses George with a few bars which register on his haggard face like a straight left.

Some of the film is glossed with Edwards' familiar, unrepentant sentimentality. But what makes this appeal to the emotions so singular, and at times so intriguing, is that it is regularly undercut either by the director's exuberant comic imagination (and he runs the gamut from slapstick to the Absurd), or by the oddly believable moments when the artifice drops away. When, for instance, George returns from his Mexican escapade, he presents himself at Sam's house only to find her going out to dinner with another man. George and his rival politely greet each other and Sam carries off her exit with efficient speed; for a second, however, and Edwards never overplays his effects, we catch the authentic, silent discomfort of the other man. Two other characters, the sympathetic bartender at the Mexican hotel (Brian Dennehy), and a guest at the hotel, Mary Lewis (Dee Wallace), a woman definitely in need of patching, are allowed the space to develop and effectively counterpoint the prevailing tone of 'fantasy' with a sense of hard-edged, unsentimental melancholy.

It is as a comedy, however, that "10" chiefly recommends itself. And it is not to downgrade Dudley Moore's 'natural' performance—he looks the universal duffer, tripping across the scalding Mexican sand in an ill-fitting grey sweat-suit—to say that the comedy is largely to the director's (and the editor's) credit. Having taken a header over his own back hedge and tumbled down a hill, George pulls himself up to reach the telephone beside his pool: a far-away chorus of dogs puts an unobtrusive final touch to his indignity. The misadventures of the sublime Clouseau stemmed from Peter Sellers' talent and the director's almost abstract command of the laws of farce; George's, on the other hand, reaffirm Edwards' developed taste for an individual style of social comedy.

JOHN PYM



## THE FILMS IN MY LIFE

By François Truffaut

ALLEN LANE, £6.95

Bernard Shaw reviewed plays before he wrote them, but his more memorable criticism is reserved for music. Graham Greene was a regular film reviewer for two magazines in the 1930s during the early, and best, part of his career as a novelist. He went on to write memorable screenplays which were directed by others. Where in the annals of criticism can be found a genius who started his career as a journeyman reviewer and went on to practise the art he had written about with such

ardour? Baudelaire? Much more about painting and music than poetry. Berlioz? Score settling or sublime accounts of sublime achievements in the past.

But now we have in English translation a volume of selected reviews and comments by François Truffaut on films. He is one of the greatest practitioners in the brief, glorious history of that art. Even those who do not agree with this judgment will find so much that is original, passionate and absorbing in *The Films in my Life* that it becomes at once one of the most interesting books about films ever written.

There are, of course, eccentricities

in Truffaut's judgment—even an occasional perversity. For example, it seems something more than oversight not to mention the performance of Judy Holliday in a review of *It Should Happen to You*. He also responds to the films of Robert Aldrich with an enthusiasm which I find puzzling; I should add that he writes in detail about a good number of films I have never seen—but since he makes me want to see them he has done a good turn to anyone in my position.

The clear influence on his writing, and the man most quoted, is André Bazin, whose distinguished editorship of *Cahiers du Cinéma* included publishing the work of other young writers who later turned director, among them Rohmer and Godard. The most celebrated theory of criticism produced by *Cahiers* was that of the *auteur*, and it was followers of this theory, including Truffaut, who did so much properly to establish American directors like Ray and Hawks as individual artists whose work transcends the squalidly avaricious world of Hollywood. Truffaut loves what he calls 'the violent charm of the most commercial films in the world, the

series of productions made in Hollywood between 1940 and 1955.'

In fact, Truffaut's appreciative response is so wide that one notices with interest a few names absent from the roll of honour which, in a sense, this book is. He does not seem to like any English film at all, not even the early Reed or Lean, and reserves a special scorn for *Bridge on the River Kwai*. More surprisingly, there is not a single mention of Antonioni—surprising because he is so eager to share his particular enthusiasm for two of his other great European contemporaries, Fellini and Bergman. One longs to know what he felt about, say, the scenes in *L'Avventura* when the characters fall into a trance of complicity *not* to find the girl lost on the island. And surely he must have admired parts if not the whole of *L'Eclisse*? Did he think, as did other excellent critics, that both *La Notte* and *Zabriskie Point* were pretentious tosh? It is the simplest tribute to the liveliness and revelatory quality of his writing that we look for opinions on films which particularly interest us.

To say that his reviewing is both rapturous and rigorous is not a paradox. The rigour is in the

examination of how certain effects of directing, writing and acting are achieved; the rapture is demonstrated here in print with the same urgency and delight as it was on the screen in *Day for Night*. What is more, he has his priorities right. Reviewing Claude Berri's *Le Cinéma de Papa* he writes: 'The humanity of Charlie Chaplin's films is made of the same stuff: the necessity of three meals a day, to find work, to be happy in love. These are the best themes, the most simple and universal... Berri's films believe in chance and luck, but even more in energy... Cinema requires poetry, sensitivity, intelligence, but even more imperatively, it needs vitality.'

Although the majority of the pieces are devoted to celebrating individual films and their makers, it is wrong to assume that Truffaut's own sensitivity, intelligence and vitality does not respond to performance. Here he is on James Dean. 'He is a cat, a lion or perhaps a squirrel. What can they do which is most unlike human beings? A cat can fall from a great height and land on its paws... Lions creep and roar; squirrels jump from one branch to another. So what one must write are scenes in which he creeps (amid the beanstalks), roars (in a police station), leaps from a great height into an empty pool without getting hurt. I like to think this is how Kazan, Ray and... George Stevens proceeded.' He ends what is in fact an obituary of Dean thus: 'He met his death on the road one cool September evening, like the young American described in Cocteau's *Enfants Terribles*: "The car leapt, twisted, crashed against a tree and became a silent ruin, one wheel spinning slower and slower like a raffle wheel."

Here is a central point in Truffaut's work both as a director and a reviewer—he is as ecstatically at home with literature as he is with cinema. He appears less interested in painting, and it's significant that, reeling his films through my head, the images of art are either popular (*Snow White*, in a cartoon magazine, is 'quoted' at the end of *La Sirène du Mississippi*), photographic (stills figure in almost all his films—indeed how much Dr. Itard in *L'Enfant Sauvage* would have relished taking snaps of the boy in his ascent to humanity, had the camera been invented!), or portraits of writers (Balzac in *Quatre Cents Coups*, Keats and Emily Brontë in *Les Deux Anglaises et le Continent*). He has something interesting to say about this in a passing remark about *Casque d'Or*. It is, he says, 'a visual tour de force, a dance, a brawl in the backyard, an awakening in the countryside... these images are like magazine covers. This visual enchantment confirms me in my conviction that cinema is a popular art, and that it deceives itself when it tries to bring the paintings of the masters to life.' Again we long to know what he thought of Visconti's *Senso*, a great film which brought together Verdi, Venice and passionate love and in which all sequences and many individual shots are delicate homages to—or variations on—the Venetian school

of painting. The only Visconti film mentioned is *Notti Bianche*, the most subdued of Visconti's romances, and based on a story by Dostoevsky.

The finest perceptions in this book are reserved for the masters of cinema: Vigo, Welles, Renoir, Chaplin, Gance, Mizoguchi, Truffaut sees more in Hitchcock than I do but virtually converts me to the work of Bresson—quite a feat, after my own unrapturous hours spent in a dark hall confronting the whiteness of a taut curtain ruffled only by images of genuflection, and those pauses manufactured by an orgulous artist in search of humility. But here Truffaut corrects and exalts: 'This particular film [*Un Condamné à Mort s'est échappé*], once set on its perfectly straight path, rushes into the night with the same rhythm as a windshield-wiper; its dissolves regularly wipe the rain of images at the end of each scene off the screen.' Well, if Truffaut says so, it's worth seeing again.

He says in this review that the work must be seen more than once to begin to appreciate it. (He is writing in 1956, before his debut as a director.) In 1967, already a famous artist himself, Truffaut writes with a sort of wild modesty: 'I am no longer a film critic, and I realise that it's presumptuous to write about a film one has seen only three times—but it's really like a dress rehearsal, simply some impressions, and a great pleasure that I long to share.' Only three times? I can happily boast that I have seen several films by Truffaut three times, and not many by other directors more often—I also guess I will return to his reviews again and again, because his criticism has so many of the qualities which mark his films—wit, surprise, generosity, fastidiousness and humanity.

Although there are many excellent interviews with Truffaut both in print and, archives allowing, on TV, what we miss most is the artist on himself. He's a great 'preferer': so, does he like *La Peau Douce* more than *Adèle H*? Is he, like so many artists, more fond of his failures than his successes? Or, like even more craftsmen, is he more in love with the enterprise which immediately engrosses him? In the introduction to this volume there are some thrilling hints. What we wait for now is *My Life and My Films*—Renoir's title.

JULIAN JEBB

## LE LIVRE DE LOSEY

By Michel Ciment

STOCK, PARIS

At 466 pages, *Le Livre de Losey* is probably the most extensive interview film book to have been published to date. And certainly one of the most valuable, even though it hovers on the brink of a frankness which sometimes makes one wonder, given that past contempt for the cinema has led to the present extraordinary proliferation of the taped interview considered as a critical as well as an historical tool, whether the debate that stirred French literary criticism during the 19th century might not be due for revival.

Sainte-Beuve, if you remember, was the auteurist before his time who believed—'I may be able to enjoy a work, but it is difficult for me to judge it without knowledge of the man who wrote it'—that acquaintance with a writer's biography and intimate psychology was essential to an understanding of his work. Against him were ranged the disciples of Taine, a determinist who argued that heredity, environment and the historical moment result in 'a dominant faculty' which determines the kind of work a writer must infallibly produce.

The distinction is perhaps too fine or too theoretical to be worth bothering with any more, but it is brought to mind by the pages on *Eva* in *Le Livre de Losey*, a film which anyone familiar with Joseph Losey's earlier interviews will already know was one very close to his heart, and horribly butchered by its producers. Here Losey goes into much greater detail about the background to the film, explaining how it evolved out of his own marital and emotional problems (not to mention his sense of exile from his roots, reflected through the Stanley Baker character's Welshness) with a candour that pulls up short just this side of embarrassing. But the danger with the taped interview is not so much that it can turn into this sort of psychological true confession (both Losey and Michel Ciment are well aware of that pitfall anyway), as that a critic faced with such a convincing and comprehensive statement (invaluable in determining intentions when a film has been tampered with before public screening) may be beguiled into accepting the intention as the accomplishment. Flawed though it be, *Eva* is a fascinating film, but it becomes even more fascinating when one knows what Losey had in mind. Should one keep such considerations in mind, and can they (should they) be kept separate from what one actually sees on the screen? It's a debatable point.

At the same time, or contrariwise, *Le Livre de Losey* is a superb example of the way interview material can help to redefine or reorientate what seemed to be key historical moments. Hitherto, the main effect of the blacklist on Losey's creativity appeared to be that, by sending him into exile in England, it led him to those *anni mirabiles* in which he began to cast a foreigner's eye over the death throes of the British class system. The cold, mathematical calculation with which *The Servant* uses a scalpel to dissect the corpse tallies well enough with this notion of an outsider's fascinated but uninvolved view. But what of the warmth, the nostalgia even, of *Accident*, *Secret Ceremony* and *The Go-Between*?

One of the most significant sections of the book deals with Losey's upbringing in Wisconsin, within a family whose past grandeurs were being gradually eroded by fading fortunes and failed ambitions. The pressures of culture and liberalism on the one hand, snobbery and prejudice on the other, led fairly predictably to the kind of rebellion

which plunged Losey into Leftist theatre work during the 30s. It also leads Michel Ciment, with Losey's reminiscences of his family background irresistibly conjuring the bitter-sweet atmosphere of Welles' film, to ask the leading question: 'Do you wish you had made *Magnificent Ambersons*?' 'Yes,' says Losey, 'of course; more than any other film.'

From this it is but a small leap to realising that, cut off by exile from the context which permitted the socially relevant themes that inspired his early American films (it was during his Hollywood period, with its attendant sense of irrelevance, that Losey actually joined the Communist Party), Losey perforce began to turn increasingly in on himself; and that the spellbinding alliance of mordancy and tenderness in his later British films arose from their admixture of observation and memory. They seem, in fact, to be not so much the product of a happy encounter between talent and accidental circumstances, as of 'a dominant faculty' in which heredity, environment and the historical moment determined that *these* were the films Losey must infallibly make.

However that may be, *Le Livre de Losey* bristles with information, insights and revelatory observations, such as the section in which Losey talks of his habit of seeking a visual correlative for each film in either painting or photography (Rowlandson for *The Gypsy and the Gentleman*, of course, and Goya for *Time Without Pity*; but also Victorian prison photographs for *The Criminal*, John Berger's paintings of miners for *Blind Date*, the pointillistes for *Accident*). One of the most illuminating anecdotes concerns *Secret Ceremony* and Losey's memory of the street where he grew up, in particular a house inhabited by two strange old ladies who rarely went out or were seen, who eventually died, and whose abandoned house with its broken windows, overgrown garden and mysterious relics became a fearful playground for the local children... *Le Livre de Losey*, which is to be followed by another volume containing a selection of writings, work notes and letters, is a must for anyone interested in Losey's work.

TOM MILNE

## KEATON: THE MAN WHO WOULDN'T LIE DOWN

By Tom Dardis

ANDRE DEUTSCH, £6.50

Tom Dardis' biography provides the fullest study yet of Buster Keaton's life and work, prepared with a care that will make it essential basic reading for any future researcher. Academically, the book is hard to fault: Dardis has taken great care to document his sources thoroughly and provides a comprehensive index and detailed bibliography. The 30-page filmography, which covers not only all Keaton's silent and sound films but his major television appearances of the 1950s and 60s and his uncredited work as a gagwriter or technical adviser, is on its own a

major addition to Keaton scholarship.

Keaton's childhood and silent films have been documented in detail by Rudi Blesh, David Robinson and others. Dardis covers much the same ground, but directs a healthy cynicism at some of the accepted facts of Keaton's early life. His suggestion that some renowned incidents, such as the cyclone that carried the three-year-old Buster several blocks before depositing him without injury, may have had more to do with Joe Keaton's flair for publicity than historical fact is eminently believable, despite the fact that Keaton himself considered such stories true.

Much has been made of Keaton's early vaudeville training, but Dardis is perhaps the first commentator to draw attention to the fact that being nightly knocked about on stage by a strict father who was becoming increasingly addicted to drink may have taught the young Buster to fall without hurting himself, but almost certainly left indelible psychic scars. These may well have helped shape Keaton's screen persona, but in his private life they led to alcoholism and a passivity in his relations with women and employers that caused two failed marriages and the decline of his career.

Dardis' accounts of Keaton's films are descriptive rather than analytical, and in the case of the silent films provide little information that is not easily accessible elsewhere. The book's strength is rather in its description of the forces that shaped Keaton's career, and it really comes into its own when dealing with the period of his artistic and financial decline. Dardis charts the effect of Keaton's alcoholism and loss of personal control over his films in meticulous if harrowing detail, demonstrating that the two were closely interlinked: Keaton gave MGM little cause for confidence in him, his drinking having by the early 30s reached a point where it was leading to lost production time. (Whether, conversely, production conditions that made Buster feel less like an anonymous cog in the studio machine would have reduced his drinking is a question that must remain largely unanswered.) And a major factor influencing MGM's refusal to change the way they were employing Keaton was that, ironically, these early sound films were extremely successful. *Sidewalks of New York*, which Dardis describes as 'surely the worst of all Keaton's sound features', grossed \$855,000, for a net profit of nearly 200,000 dollars.

Keaton's sound films have not previously been extensively documented, but Dardis' descriptions indicate that they were quite as bad as other writers have suggested. The one significant exception seems to have been *Le Roi des Champs-Élysées*, a film produced in Paris by Seymour Nebenzal, the producer of such German classics as *Kameradschaft* and *M*. Since this film allowed Keaton to do precisely what he had been suggesting since the coming of sound—to 'keep quiet with lots of sound all round me'—its success must to some extent be

regarded as a vindication of Keaton's complaints about MGM. (A discussion of *Le Roi des Champs-Élysées* by the American film historian William K. Everson may be found in *Films in Review*, December 1976.) But Dardis does indicate that, in all save the very worst of his sound films, there are occasional flashes of Keaton's old inventiveness: an Apache dance in *Doughboys*; a chase over and under the Monte Carlo roulette tables in *The Passionate Plumber*; a flight from a truckload of barrels in *What, No Beer?*, reminiscent of the mountaintop sequence in *Seven Chances*.

Throughout the years of his obscurity, Keaton was consistently aided in finding work by the loyalty of old friends, much as he himself had once helped Roscoe Arbuckle find work directing after the Virginia Rappe scandal had destroyed Arbuckle's acting career. His 1951 television series was suggested by Harold Lloyd, a more generous rival than Charles Chaplin, who paid Keaton a flat \$1,000 for his appearance in *Limelight*. As Dardis points out, although it may seem tragic that Keaton was reduced to such straits, his own view was considerably different: 'I've had an interesting career. I have no complaints!'

ALLAN T. SUTHERLAND

#### JOURNEY DOWN SUNSET BOULEVARD: The Films of Billy Wilder

By Neil Sinyard and Adrian Turner

BCW PUBLISHING, £8.95

The authors of this welcome and highly readable volume declare their partisanship in an introduction which stoutly maintains that the *auteur* theory 'could never have made complete sense while Wilder was excluded from the Pantheon.' They proceed to lay stress (and one fears that even this late in the day it is a necessary gesture) on removing their subject from the restricting grasp of 'cynicism' and 'bad taste' and on evidencing—as well as his 'invisible' mastery of form—the romantic and humanist elements of his films.

What follows is a succession of essays on each of Wilder's directed films, together with three of the key movies out of the many on which he earlier had script credit (*Ninotchka*, *Midnight*, *Hold Back the Dawn*). The progress is not, however, chronological; rather, works of widely differing vintage—Wilder's directorial career, after all, spans some 35 years—are grouped in loose thematic clusters.

In the event, such a method does not seem to work very clearly to the book's advantage. The groupings appear fairly arbitrary, and are in any case not based on explicit criteria. Direct comparisons, moreover, are mainly avoided, although one could envisage, for example, that the stylistic and emotional contrasts offered within ostensibly related material between, say, *Ace in the Hole* and *The Front Page*, or between *Love in the*

*Afternoon and Irma la Douce*, might provide the basis of a profitable critical exercise.

This procedure risks obscuring the development of the career, and tends, too, to have an unbalancing effect on the book's own structure, with the final pages rather sliding away into a consideration of what the authors see as failed (*The Lost Weekend*, *The Seven Year Itch*) or marginal works. Incidentally, although the latter category, no doubt correctly, includes *The Spirit of St Louis*, one is relieved to find due tribute paid in passing to that neglected film's showmanship and Fordian atmospheric flair.

The value of the book, then, lies in the quality of its individual critiques, and inevitably some are more impressive than others. The passage on *Avanti!*, for instance, is a model of discreet exegesis, teasing out from a descriptive account the implications and (equally important) the rhythms of a movie in which 'romantic luxuriance becomes not simply a feature of the style but a central theme.' No less worthwhile is the account of the seemingly atypical *Witness for the Prosecution*, for which Sinyard and Turner convincingly make a case—in terms of construction and staging, not just dramatic content—as providing a key demonstration of Wilder's concern with role-playing and deception. They appear to be, perhaps, on less certain ground in attempting to rehabilitate the critical status of *Sabrina*, where one detects an element of overkill in the ascription of symbolic values, and on the whole the book offers no very

striking fresh insights into the most familiar films, such as *Some Like It Hot*.

It is hard, however, not to warm to a study which offers, in the course of a useful run-down on the early *Five Graves to Cairo*, the detailed suggestion—modestly consigned to a footnote—that the movie can be seen as arising out of *Aida*. This insight—Wilderian in the fullest sense—is a by no means isolated instance of an enthusiastic idiosyncrasy which, despite occasional patches of surrounding blandness, marks the authors as *aficionados* of their subject.

TIM PULLEINE

#### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

JIM HILLIER teaches film at Bulmershe College of Higher Education... JOHN IZOD lectures on film at the University of Stirling... JULIAN POOLE is a Principal Lecturer in Communications at Manchester Polytechnic. His research into Independent Frame was initially undertaken while he was working for an MA in British Cinema at the University of East Anglia... JONATHAN ROSENBAUM has recently finished a book called *Moving Places*, due for publication in the US in September... WILLIAM F. VAN WERT teaches film and creative writing at Temple University, Philadelphia. He has written numerous articles on the cinema, as well as a recent novel, *The Age of Spectator Sports*, about wheelchair basketball.

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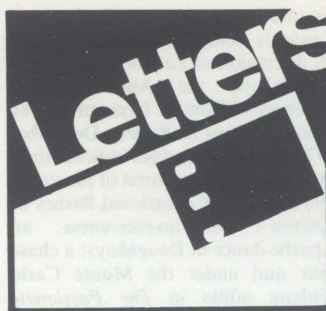
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### The Origin of *Free Thaelmann!*

SIR,—I should be grateful for an opportunity to correct a misunderstanding that has arisen following the inclusion of an extract from the film *Free Thaelmann!* in Jonathan Lewis' excellent *Before Hindsight*. An error has recently found its way into programmes and on to record-cards attributing to me an authorship that was really only an adaptation.

In the early 30s an international campaign was undertaken for the release of Ernst Thaelmann, Communist candidate in the 1932 German Presidential election, seized by the Nazis soon after their assumption of power the following year and eventually killed by them in Buchenwald during the war.

The film *Ernst Thaelmann—Fighter against Fascism* was completed in New York in 1934 under the supervision of and titled by Tom Brandon, with George Moscow as editor. Tom is thus the only person properly to be credited as its begetter. Most of the film's contents were assembled and sent to New York by a group of anti-fascist refugees from Germany working in Paris. This group was associated with the organisations and enterprises headed by Willi Munzenberg in pre-Hitler Germany (notably the many-branched aid committee the Internationale Arbeiter Hilfe). The shorter version—*Free Thaelmann!*—was trimmed, partially retitled and renamed by me, after it had been received from Tom, in 1935.

The I.A.H. film technicians among the refugees must have brought footage with them. Some of this was sent to Garrison Films in New York. Internal evidence shows the finished film to be a compilation of news shots from the I.A.H.'s Weltfilm

archives and some Soviet archives; documentary and other extracts from Prometheus, another I.A.H. film company (e.g., the shots of the red flag and street demonstrations from Pudovkin's *Deserter* which Prometheus had distributed).

Tom Brandon, then secretary of the Film and Photo League (N.Y.), was granted a leave of absence to make *Ernst Thaelmann* at Garrison, which later distributed the film in the United States and sent a copy to the Progressive Film Institute in Britain. The film's 'presents' title credited a specially formed 'Thaelmann Liberation Committee'. It was first shown in September 1934 at the 28th Street (R.K.O.) Theatre on Broadway. Alas, the negative and possibly all copies of this full version, together with other precious Garrison films, were destroyed in a New Jersey warehouse fire in late 1935.

The Progressive Film Institute offered the copy of *Ernst Thaelmann* sent to London to the Relief Committee for the Victims of German Fascism, of which I was an executive member and which, although quite independent of the I.A.H., was in touch with the Paris group of anti-fascist refugees. It was obvious, from its nature and the period, that the film was unlikely to be viewed sympathetically by the British Board of Film Censors, and that in any case its best prospect of exhibition in the U.K., as the law then stood, was in unlicensed halls on 16 mm (non-flam) stock. In such cases, experience taught, the shorter the better. Hence the trimming of *Free Thaelmann!*

Fortunately a continuity list of the full U.S. version as well as a title list of the shortened version have survived in my archive and comparison is possible. The former indicates three reels; it comprises 21 pages listing 323 shots and 99 titles. *Free Thaelmann!* is noted in the National Film Archive catalogue as 1,670 ft. and has 67 titles in all. Of these, 46 are originals retained and 21 are cut down from more wordy originals.

There is no trace so far of any other contemporary Thaelmann film of the 30s, not even in France. It seems that the one and only form in which the whole enterprise survives is as *Free Thaelmann!*, and it is perhaps

'*Free Thaelmann!*': Thaelmann behind bars



sad and a little ironic that, so long after the killing of the victim it sought to save, the film, as now a classic of film history, is having a wider life than ever before, being now available on 16 mm not only in the U.K. and North America, but in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Yours faithfully,

IVOR MONTAGU

Garston, Watford.

### Apocalypse Now

SIR,—The stimulating commentaries on *Apocalypse Now* by Michael Dempsey and John Pym (SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1979/80) rightly place great emphasis on the film's cinematic and literary allusiveness. Perhaps insufficient attention has been paid, however, to the work which, consciously or unconsciously, seems to have had the most significant influence on the film. I refer to Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*.

The most striking visual connection is probably the appearance of Marlon Brando's Kurtz, whose bald skull and face in half-shadow is strikingly similar to that of Orson Welles' Kane in his tent, both men listening to the beat of drums outside. Both films are about the deaths of men who have turned themselves into kings, into gods (as the shooting script of *Citizen Kane* emphasises when describing Kane's death: 'The dominating note is one of almost exaggerated tropical lushness... Angkor Wat, the night the last king died'). Leland in *Citizen Kane*, after the election defeat that signals Kane's disillusionment with democracy, almost predicts Coppola's presentation of Kurtz, ironically suggesting that Kane should 'sail away to a desert island and lord it over the monkeys.' Kurtz and Kane are men of limitless, frustrated potential; men who are disappointed with the world and so build their own monarchies; men who are damned or deified according to the point of view of the person who is speaking. Both films are dominated by the meaning of this dying god's last words: in *Apocalypse Now*, 'The horror, the horror'; in *Citizen Kane*, 'Rosebud'.

Both films are structured around the concept of interior journeys. The search for Kurtz is also a search for understanding Kurtz, bringing enlightenment out of the jungle; the search for 'Rosebud' is also a search for the explanation of Kane, bringing truth from out of the shadows. In both cases, these become metaphysical journeys, a movement away from realism towards myth—towards Kurtz as the 'savage god' who must be sacrificed; towards Kane as Kubla Khan in his own Xanadu. To complete his possibly unwitting tribute to *Citizen Kane*, Coppola even interpolates—very awkwardly, it must be said—his own perverse opera scene: the bombing of the village to Wagner's 'Ride of the Valkyries'.

It must be emphasised that there are many dimensions to *Apocalypse Now* which this analogy does not encompass. But it might be that the key to the film's structure and to its presentation of Kurtz is to be found in Coppola's *ciné-literacy*: *Kane* rather than Conrad. This is not to

deny the importance of the literary allusions. But then, of course, the main literary source for *Apocalypse* was *Heart of Darkness*—which, before *Citizen Kane* came along, was to be the first film of Orson Welles.

Yours faithfully,

Walsall.

NEIL SINYARD

SIR,—I find the recent over-use of 'visceral' and 'portentous' (either literally or as a solecism for pretentious) in film writing has now managed to find its way into your pages (Michael Dempsey).

Any chance of declaring a ten-year moratorium on these before they become totally hackneyed?

Yours faithfully,

Oxford.

BERNARD O'KANE

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

RANK FILM DISTRIBUTORS for *Bad Timing*, *The Human Factor*.

20TH CENTURY-FOX for *Something for Everyone*, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *Walkabout*.

UNITED ARTISTS for *Cuba*, *Electra*. CIC for *Escape from Alcatraz*, *Madigan*.

ENTERPRISE PICTURES for *Black Jack*. ARTIFICIAL EYE for *Hortobagy*, *Mirror*.

GALA FILM DISTRIBUTORS for *Messidor*.

CONTEMPORARY FILMS for *Savages*, *Sérial*.

GTO FILMS for *Phantasm*.

MIRACLE FILMS for *Halloween*.

TARGET INTERNATIONAL for *Zombies*.

AMANDA FILMS for *Riot in Cell Block 11*.

CRAWFORD FILMS for *A Taste of Honey*.

ANDREA FILMS for *Mon Oncle d'Amérique*.

UNITE TROIS (Paris)/PARADIS FILMS (Brussels) for *La Mémoire Courte*.

VIVA INTERNATIONAL/ACTION FILMS for *City of Women*.

ICAIC for *El Extrano Caso de Rachel K.*

MRINAL SEN PRODUCTIONS for *And Quiet Rolls the Day*.

HEINZ ANGERMEYER/MFG

FILMGESSELLSCHAFT/FILMAUFBAU for *The Clown*.

ABC NEWS (London) for *Good Morning America*.

MCA TELEVISION for *The Last Convertible*.

THAMES TELEVISION for *Charlie's Angels*.

BBC PICTURE PUBLICITY for *Dallas*.

BERT HOGENKAMP for *Free Thaelmann*.

KEVIN BROWNLOW for *The Terror Trail*.

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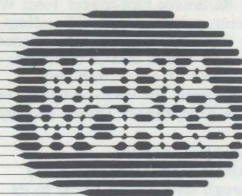
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# Film Guide

## ...AND JUSTICE FOR ALL

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)  
A flailing assault on the American legal profession, which indicts all manner of personal and professional iniquities. Most incriminating is its own hysterical imprecision and sentimental pleading. Al Pacino, as an idealistic attorney, thrashes through the System and the plot. (Jack Warden, John Forsythe; director, Norman Jewison.)

## \*\*BAD TIMING (Rank)

Another of Nicolas Roeg's dazzling mosaic puzzles, complete with doppelgänger motif, set in Freud's Vienna and putting his theories on trial as a psychoanalyst (Art Garfunkel) courts tragedy by obsessively trying to probe the mysteries of the girl he loves. (Theresa Russell, Harvey Keitel, Denholm Elliott.) *Reviewed.*

## BLACK HOLE, THE

(Disney)  
This trailing entry in the galactic stakes banks on variable effects and familiar Disney japes, with Maximilian Schell (the new Nemo) in charge of a glasshouse spacecraft. Oddly inappropriate (and skimmed) apocalyptic end, with corkscrew hole sucking the baddies into Dante's Inferno. (Anthony Perkins, Ernest Borgnine; director, Gary Nelson.)

## \*BLACK JACK (Enterprise)

Leon Garfield's story about a boy's adventures with a French outlaw in 18th century Yorkshire, directed in characteristically low-key style by Ken Loach. The air of improvisation and the studiously unhurried pace may puzzle children conditioned by television to expect a faster narrative drive. (Stephen Hirst, Jean Franval, Louise Cooper.) *Reviewed.*

## \*\*BROOD, THE (Alpha)

Strikingly atmospheric, rather Hitchcockian David Cronenberg horror movie, ultimately flawed (like *Rabid*) by bland non-explanations of the horrible psychological disease it imagines as the result of new 'psychoplasmic' therapies. (Samantha Eggar, Oliver Reed, Art Hindle.)

## CARAVANS (Bordeaux)

Turgid Mid-Eastern adventure with Anthony Quinn as the put-upon leader of a band of gun-running bedouin and Jennifer O'Neill as the American miss who adds to his troubles by (inexplicably) opting to join him in the supposedly simple life. (Michael Sarrazin; director, James Fargo.)

## \*\*CUBA (United Artists)

After the surprisingly (but pleasingly) muted *Butch and Sundance*, Richard Lester's patchwork technique is at full stretch in *Cuba*. The result is a fascinatingly diagrammatic fusion of old-time romance and pop-revolutionary history lesson. (Sean Connery, Brooke Adams, Jack Weston.) *Reviewed.*

## \*ELECTRIC HORSEMAN, THE

(CIC)  
Ecology and the 'real' West are on the line again in this triumphantly simple-minded fable, which unites has-been rodeo star (Robert Redford) with hot-shot newswoman (Jane Fonda, naturally) against Prince of Commercial Darkness (John Saxon). Sydney Pollack handles the obvious with sympathetic restraint. (Valerie Perrine.)

## FEMALE TROUBLE (Mainline)

More hole-in-the-wall 'nastiness' from the Baltimore film-maker John Waters. Divine, a gross 'female' hoodlum, and the Waters stock company prance through a high school-to-electric chair yarn. For all their confident exuberance, the wide-swinging ruderies make little impact. (Edith Massey.)

## \*GET OUT YOUR HANDKERCHIEFS (Curzon)

Though unpalatably sexist in its conception of the female character (Carole Laure), a generally engaging if basically old-fashioned comedy. Director Bertrand Blier takes Godard's conceit from *Une femme est une femme*—a man 'offers' his girl friend to a total stranger—to its (il)logical conclusion. (Gérard Depardieu, Patrick Dewaere.)

## \*\*GREEN ROOM, THE (Gala)

Freely adapting Henry James' short novel, *The Altar of the Dead*, François Truffaut (who also plays the leading role) reconciles the Orphic and psychic reverberations of necrophilia in his most powerful film for years. Its pervasive morbidity, however, enhanced by Nestor Almendros' sombre photography, may not be to every taste. (Nathalie Baye, Jean Dasté.)

## \*HUMAN FACTOR, THE (Rank)

Faithful, bloodless version of Greene's shade too geometric novel, in which a distinguished cast rehearse the old arguments about the moral ambiguities of treachery. Stoppard's script, Preminger's direction and Nicol Williamson's traitor all seem to be working at odds. (Richard Attenborough, Robert Morley.) *Reviewed.*

## \*\*JERK, THE (CIC)

Often brilliant but very patchy Carl Reiner comedy about a white Candide, raised as a cotton-picking black, who falls foul of the rat race when he sets out to claim his true, go-getting heritage. (Steve Martin, Bernadette Peters.)

## \*\*JUNOON (Glanard Wood)

Sympathetic, often striking attempt to view the brutalities of the Indian Mutiny through the prism of an impossible passion between an Anglo-Indian girl and a Pathan prince. Doesn't get its balances quite right, but is particularly good on the subtle network of conflicting loyalties. (Shashi Kapoor, Jennifer Kendal; director, Shyam Benegal.)

## \*KNIFE IN THE HEAD

(Contemporary)  
Abandoning his forthright style, director Reinhard Hauff shadow-boxes with another 'conspiracy' tale set in a strait-jacketed West Germany. Bruno Ganz, a geneticist deliberately/accidentally shot by the police, harrowingly portrays a man reduced to a near-vegetable state pulling himself back to life. (Angela Winkler.)

## \*KRAMER VS. KRAMER (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

A cunningly packaged soap opera, once slated for Truffaut (Nestor Almendros remains as photographer), in which a Manhattan father rediscovers the joys of parenthood when wife decamps to find herself. A problem picture to warm (Stanley) Kramer's heart, directed with an elliptical 'subtlety' that begs many questions. (Dustin Hoffman, Meryl Streep, Justin Henry; director, Robert Benton.)

## MAGICIAN OF LUBLIN, THE

(Entertainment)  
Disastrous adaptation of Isaac Singer's romance about a troubled illusionist in turn of the century Poland. Damaged beyond redemption by the mishmash of California Polish accents grappling with ham-fisted direction and a script of surpassing banality. (Alan Arkin, Louise Fletcher, Shelley Winters; director, Menahem Golan.)

## MEATBALLS (CIC)

Dire campus comedy about the frolics

of student supervisors at a summer camp for children. Aims at the anarchy of *M\*A\*S\*H*, but staggers into a slough of sentimentality and misfiring jokes. (Bill Murray, Harvey Atkin; director, Ivan Reitman.)

## \*\*MIRROR (Artificial Eye)

Stormily received in the Soviet Union by the arbiters of socialist realism, Andrei Tarkovsky's autobiographical essay in the interaction of private and collective memories, via a multi-layered structure of flashbacks, dream sequences and newsreel footage, is chillingly impressive even at its most hermetic. (Philip Yankovsky, Margarita Terekhova, Oleg Yankovsky.) *Reviewed.*

## MURDER BY DECREE (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Odd moments of spookiness do not dispel the bogus quality of this trumped-up Sherlock Holmes 'mystery': Jack the Ripper's handiwork is palmed off as that of two madmen in the employ of the Duke of Clarence. James Mason and Christopher Plummer play Watson and Holmes with relaxed, sometimes credible affability. (Genevieve Bujold; director, Bob Clark.)

## \*\*MY BRILLIANT CAREER (Mainline)

The sentimental education of a turn of the century Australian girl ambitious to move from bush to Bach. A winning performance from Judy Davis, persuasively registering the character's mix of wilfulness and fragility, patches over a few uncertainties of script and direction. (Sam Neill, Wendy Hughes; director, Gillian Armstrong.)

## NIGHTWING (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Vampire bats plus plague-bearing fleas roost in a canyon in an Arizona Indian reservation. Disaster is anticlimactically averted by a possessed bat hunter (David Warner) and a disgruntled Indian cop, high on an hallucinogenic mushroom. (Nick Mancuso; director, Arthur Hillier.)

## \*\*1941 (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Steven Spielberg's raucous comedy blockbuster comes on as an unprepossessing mixture of *Mad*, *Mad World* and any *Carry On* frolic. The real joke (and the point), however, is not Spielberg's taste for low smut and ever bigger explosions but his combined exaltation and destruction of the Hollywood machine. (John Belushi, Robert Stack, Warren Oates, Toshiro Mifune.)

## \*NORTH DALLAS FORTY (CIC)

A laconic sports picture, about the skulduggery of pro-football management. Its chief interest is Nick Nolte's battered central performance as an anaesthetised veteran player nursing a multitude of wounds (physical and psychological) but driven by an old-fashioned sense of honour. (Mac Davis, G. D. Spradlin; director, Ted Kotcheff.)

## \*ONION FIELD, THE (GTO)

An ultimately unfocused moral tract drawn from the case of two men who cheated the death penalty for the murder of a Californian policeman. Compellingly, at times chillingly told from the prisoners' viewpoint, the film falls down in its soft-centred special pleading on behalf of the dead man's buddy. (James Woods, John Savage, Franklin Seales; director, Harold Becker.)

## \*ORCHESTRA REHEARSAL

(Premier)  
Fellini's made-for-TV movie is politically dubious as an allegory of contemporary strife and too slackly shot (and dubbed) to generate much interest in its cast as people rather than puppets. Might generously be regarded as a left-handed doodle dashed off while his right hand was already at work on another *magnum opus*. (Balduin Baas, Clara Colosimo, Elisabeth Labi.)

## \*ROCK 'N' ROLL HIGH SCHOOL

(New World)  
Exploitation *par excellence*: a frenzied

teenage farce built round the Ramones pop group, which rather engagingly wears its opportunism on its sleeve while cramming in sundry in-jokes and cinematic flourishes along the way. (P. J. Soles, Vincent Van Patten; director, Allan Arkush.)

## \*\*ROLE, THE (Contemporary)

Perhaps Shyam Benegal's best film to date, with the Indian commercial cinema serving as setting, symbol and catalyst as a girl (the superb Smita Patil) escapes the role traditionally reserved for Indian women by becoming a star, only to find herself even more surely trapped. (Anant Nag, Amrish Puri.)

## RUNNER STUMBLES, THE (Barber Rose)

Father Dick Van Dyke gets guiltily hot under the dog-collar for young nun Kathleen Quinlan, and their mutual crisis of faith ends in his arraignment for her murder. Heavy Broadway dialogue, overstated melodrama, and Stanley Kramer at his most irreverently monumental. (Beau Bridges, Maureen Stapleton.)

## SILVER DREAM RACER (Rank)

Overwrought drama—hackneyed script packaged like a feature-length commercial—about a poor boy who dreams of becoming a motorcycle superstar. David Essex, woodenly playing the lead, also supplies a leaden score. (Beau Bridges, Cristina Raines; director, David Wickes.)

## \*STARTING OVER (CIC)

Alan Pakula gracefully steers this rather maladroit comedy of maladroit modern romance past one or two obvious reefs, but never really strikes a balance between angst and amusement. Burt Reynolds and Jill Clayburgh keep the comedy enjoyably light, but fail to resolve the uncertain mood. (Candice Bergen, Charles Durning.)

## \*\*STAR TREK THE MOTION PICTURE (CIC)

Awkward reintroduction of the hallowed TV characters and some long-winded exposition make for a slow start. But a pleasantly downbeat plot—contemplatively light years away from *Star Wars*—nicely delivered special effects and Robert Wise's leisurely, unfussy direction exert a grip. (William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, Persis Khambatta.)

## SWISSMAKERS, THE

(Contemporary)  
Self-consciously knowing dig at the Swiss national character, as revealed by the antics of a pair of immigration police investigating candidates for citizenship. Incidental visual gags can't disguise the stolidity of a film whose style is uncomfortably close to its subject. (Walo Lüönd, Emil Steinberger, Beatrice Kessler; director, Rolf Lyssy.)

## \*TEMPEST, THE (Mainline)

Derek Jarman's version of the Bard—shot on a low budget, partly at Stoneleigh Abbey—is ingenious and decoratively fetching but its interpretation never begins to cohere. The verse speaking is, to say the least, variable. (Heathcote Williams, Toyah Wilcox, Jack Birkett.)

## \*WANDERERS, THE (GTO)

A period gang movie, revealing that director Philip Kaufman's erratically effective *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* was no flash in the pan. *Wanderers* is as vividly detailed and loosely controlled, trailing away in a multiplicity of endings and held together only by its songs. (Ken Wahl, John Friedrich, Linda Manz.)

## ZOMBIES (Target)

This jockey sequel to *Night of the Living Dead* (1969)—the clockwork zombies are now well on the way to overruning the United States—trowels on the increasingly unconvincing gore. George A. Romero attempts a statement about consumer values, but cops out, after two long hours, with a happy ending. (David Emge, Ken Foree, Scott Reiniger, Gaylen Ross.)

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